

# **Citizen Charter Review Committee**

January 22, 2026  
11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.  
Leon County Main Library  
Programming Room

## **AGENDA**

1. Call to Order and Opening

Chauncy E. Haynes,  
Vice Chair

### ***Consent***

2. Approval of January 8, 2026 Meeting Minutes
3. Receipt & File of Written Public Comments

### ***Public Comment***

### ***General Business***

- Agenda Item #1: Comparative Analysis of Bill of Rights Provisions in County Charters
- Agenda Item #2: Considerations for Addressing Poverty and Racial Inequity in the County Charter
- Agenda Item #3: Community Value of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

*The next meeting of the Citizen Charter Review Committee  
will take place on Thursday, February 5, 2026.*

**LEON COUNTY CITIZEN CHARTER REVIEW  
COMMITTEE**

**APPROVAL OF JANUARY 8, 2026 MEETING  
MINUTES**

**Citizen Charter Review Committee**  
**January 8, 2026**  
**11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.**  
**Leon County Main Library**  
**Programming Room**

The Leon County 2025-2026 Citizen Charter Review Committee (CCRC) met on January 8, 2026, at 11:30 a.m. in the Leon County Main Library with Committee members Mary Ann Lindley, Chauncy Haynes, Darryl Jones, Henry Lewis, III, Bruce Strouble, Jr., Howard Kessler, Ryan Ray, Anita Favors, Barry Wilcox, Katrina Tuggerson, Temple Robinson, Max Herrle, Shamarial Roberson, Heidi Otway, and Jarrett Terry in attendance. Also present were County Administrator Vincent Long, Assistant County Administrator Shington Lamy, County Attorney Chasity O'Steen, Assistant to the County Administrator for Legislative and Strategic Initiatives Nicki Hatch, Director of the Office of Human Services and Community Partnerships Abby Thomas, Management Analyst Cameron Williams, and Clerks to the Board, Beryl Wood and Daniel J. Antonaccio.

Absent Members: Joey Davis, Linda Bond Edwards, Liz Ellis, Slaton Murray, Sean Pittman and William Smith.

**Call to Order and Opening Mary Ann Lindley, Chair**

Chair Lindley called the meeting to order at 11:30 a.m.

**Consent:**

*Ryan Ray moved, seconded by Bruce Strouble, Jr., to approve the consent agenda as presented.*

*The motion carried 15 – 0 with Committee Members Joey Davis, Linda Bond Edwards, Liz Ellis, Slaton Murray, Sean Pittman and William Smith not present.*

*Approval of December 18, 2025 Meeting Minutes*

*Receipt & File of Written Public Comments*

**Public Comment:**

- Melanie Andrade Williams, 3349 Argonaut Drive, addressed the Committee to advocate for a medical debt relief initiative. She proposed a one-time \$500,000 investment to eliminate approximately \$50 million in medical debt for county residents, citing a similar program in Orange County. Additionally, she urged the Committee to require the continued existence of an Affordable Housing Trust Fund, prioritizing affordable rental housing.
- Stanley Sims, 1420 Avondale Way, asked that the Committee discuss possibilities for recalling elected officials.

**General Business:**

**Committee Discussion on Proposed Charter Amendments**  
**(Final Opportunity for Introduction of New Proposals)**

Nicki Hatch shared that this would be the final opportunity for the introduction of new proposals for charter amendments. She provided a recap of the two-step process to introduce charter amendment proposals. Members first presented broad concepts to be added to the list of proposals. Once listed, proposing members had the opportunity to briefly explain their proposal

and answer any questions before the committee vote on whether to have staff bring back additional analysis on the proposal. She also noted that if a member has more than one idea, then the order in which all of the ideas are considered will be handled as it has been previously with each member explaining one idea at a time in a round-robin fashion.

Chair Lindley welcomed members to offer additional charter amendment proposals to be added to the list for consideration by the Committee.

The list of proposals previously raised during the CCRC's 2025 meetings include:

1. Establishment of an Office of Inspector General, Proposed by Howard Kessler.
  - a. *Advanced for analysis at the November 20, 2025 meeting.*
2. Voting Threshold to Select or Terminate the County Administrator, Proposed by Max Herrle.
  - a. *Not advanced for analysis at the November 20, 2025 meeting.*
3. County Commission Compensation, Proposed by Max Herrle.
  - a. *Not advanced for analysis at the December 4, 2025 meeting.*
4. Funding Mechanism for Affordable Housing, Proposed by Max Herrle.
  - a. *Advanced for analysis at the December 4, 2025 meeting.*
  - b. *Advanced to Decision Agenda meeting (to consider ballot language) at January 8, 2026 meeting.*
5. Funding Mechanism for Fire Services, Proposed by Max Herrle.
  - a. *Not advanced for analysis at the December 4, 2025 meeting.*
6. Leon County Bill of Rights, Proposed by Max Herrle.
  - a. *Advanced for analysis at the December 4, 2025 meeting.*
7. Prioritization of Food Security, Proposed by Bruce Strouble, Jr.
  - a. *Advanced for analysis at the December 4, 2025 meeting.*
  - b. *Advanced to Decision Agenda meeting (to consider ballot language) at December 18, 2025 meeting.*
8. Community Restoration for Historic Harm, Proposed by Bruce Strouble, Jr.
  - a. *Advanced for analysis at the December 4, 2025 meeting.*
9. County/City Consolidation, Proposed by Henry Lewis, III.
  - a. *Advanced for analysis at the December 4, 2025 meeting.*
  - b. *Not advanced further at December 18, 2025 meeting.*
10. Funding Mechanism to Expand Primary Healthcare Access to Low-Income Residents, Proposed by Temple Robinson.
  - a. *Advanced for analysis at the December 4, 2025 meeting.*
  - b. *Advanced to Decision Agenda meeting (to consider ballot language) at January 8, 2026 meeting.*

The following proposals were added to the list for CCRC consideration during the meeting:

11. Joint City-County Land Development Code, Proposed by Barry Wilcox.
12. Recognizing Community Values of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, and Local Business Preference, Proposed by Darryl Jones.

The following proposals were explained for CCRC consideration:

#### **11.) Joint City-County Land Development Code**

Barry Wilcox proposed exploring a joint planning approach between the City and County to avoid jurisdiction shopping, including the feasibility of a unified land development code. He explained that such an approach could reduce duplication, allow the use of a single consultant, and serve as a form of functional consolidation rather than full governmental consolidation. Mr. Wilcox clarified that while a joint code could provide uniform rules countywide, it would still allow for different standards in urban and rural areas within the same framework. He further noted that building departments could remain autonomous while sharing a common guiding document. Mr. Wilcox requested an analysis to determine whether this concept would be appropriate for Charter consideration or better addressed through intergovernmental action.

Katrina Tuggerson questioned the necessity for the proposal and emphasized the importance of ensuring equity considerations within land development codes, noting concerns that certain developers could receive preferential treatment under existing plans.

Ryan Ray commented that residents currently choose to live in either the City or County with the understanding that each jurisdiction has different rules and cautioned against complicating that distinction.

Max Herrle provided contextual clarification, distinguishing between comprehensive plans as broad policy documents and land development codes as more detailed regulatory tools. He also inquired whether changes to a joint land development code would require ratification at joint City-County public meetings and questioned whether the issue rose to the level of a Charter amendment.

Henry Lewis raised concerns that the proposal could impose a higher burden on certain groups and later asked for clarification regarding the potential impact on impact fees.

County Administrator Long provided context, explaining the existing hierarchy of land-use regulation, including state requirements, the joint comprehensive plan, and separate land development codes. He noted that City and County codes are becoming more closely aligned but explained that full alignment would require extensive review of jurisdiction-specific details such as setbacks, lighting, and statutory timeframes imposed by the State Legislature. He also indicated that such an approach could require consideration of a joint Development Review Committee.

Anita Favors asked whether the intent was to create a single comprehensive document governing all land development matters.

Barry Wilcox clarified that impact fees could remain separate for the City and County and noted that Leon County's fees are relatively low compared to other Florida jurisdictions. He also clarified governance issues related to comprehensive plan amendments and explained that both governments already must approve certain text changes.

*Barry Wilcox moved, seconded by Howard Kessler, to request an item to be brought back with analysis to determine whether a joint City-County land development code would be appropriate for Charter consideration.*

*The motion failed 7 – 8 with Vice Chairman Chauncy Haynes, Anita Favors, Max Herrle, Darryl Jones, Henry Lewis, III, Ryan Ray, Shamarial Roberson and Temple Robinson in opposition. Committee Members Joey Davis, Linda Bond Edwards, Liz Ellis, Slaton Murray, Sean Pittman and William Smith were not present.*

#### **12.) Recognizing Community Values of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, and Local Business Preference**

Darryl Jones proposed developing Charter language recognizing community values such as diversity, equity, inclusion, and local business preference. He referenced practices in other communities and emphasized that such values remain important to Leon County despite shifting political environments. Mr. Jones clarified that the request was for staff analysis of potential language reflecting community values, not a directive that would conflict with state law.

Temple Robinson inquired about potential ramifications related to state and federal funding.

County Attorney O'Steen advised that the proposal, as described, would focus on values-based language rather than enforceable mandates and therefore would not necessarily create state law preemption issues.

*Darryl Jones moved, seconded by Ryan Ray, to direct staff to bring back an analysis of potential charter language recognizing diversity, equity, and inclusion and local preference as community values for the Committee's consideration.*

*The motion carried 13 – 2 with Committee Members Heidi Otway and Shamarial Roberson in opposition. Committee Members Joey Davis, Linda Bond Edwards, Liz Ellis, Slaton Murray, Sean Pittman and William Smith were not present.*

#### **Item #1: Funding Mechanisms for Affordable Housing**

Assistant County Administrator Shington Lamy delivered a presentation outlining funding mechanisms for affordable housing. The presentation detailed a wide variety of potential funding sources and discussed options to increase County investment in affordable housing, including the use and expansion of the existing Housing Trust Fund.

Henry Lewis III thanked the Board for its ongoing efforts related to affordable housing. He provided additional context regarding affordable housing needs, discussed the relationship between market-rate and affordable housing, and encouraged continued County investment in this area.

*Henry Lewis, III, moved, seconded by Vice Chairman Chauncy Haynes, for Option #2: Direct staff to include a recommendation encouraging Leon County to continue its long-standing commitment to increasing and preserving the stock of affordable housing in the community as part of the Citizen Charter Review Committee report.*

*The motion was not voted on.*

Bruce Strouble, Jr., asked how many of the proposed units would be considered affordable for very low-income residents and whether that data is tracked.

Shington Lamy responded that all 1,200 units referenced would be designated for low-income households, noting that the units would fall into different affordability categories. He further explained that annual funding contributions would continue to build capacity for affordable housing over time.

Max Herrle distributed a handout outlining potential dedicated revenue sources and permissible uses for an affordable housing trust fund, including examples of similar measures in Alachua, Brevard, Broward and Orange Counties.

County Administrator Long reminded the Committee that the County has already established a Housing Trust Fund.

*Max Herrle made a substitute motion, seconded by Bruce Strouble, Jr., to direct staff to review the distributed handout and committee feedback and bring back options for Committee consideration, including potential charter amendment language and other related recommendations to support affordable housing.*

*The motion carried 12 – 3 with Chair Mary Ann Lindley, Darryl Jones and Henry Lewis, III, in opposition. Committee Members Joey Davis, Linda Bond Edwards, Liz Ellis, Slaton Murray, Sean Pittman and William Smith were not present.*

#### **Item #2: Funding Mechanisms for Healthcare Access for Low-Income Residents**

Assistant County Administrator Shington Lamy provided a presentation on funding mechanisms for healthcare access for low income residents. He highlighted the healthcare responsibility of the federal and state governments, and the County's dedication to ensuring access to high quality healthcare for more than two decades. He also noted the County's annual investments and leveraging of funds.

Temple Robinson addressed the Committee regarding the importance of access to local healthcare, noting that global health organizations consistently recognize its role in improving workforce participation and productivity while reducing overall healthcare costs. She noted that access to healthcare remains a challenge for many residents and emphasized that her request was not focused on specific funding levels or implementation methods, but on ensuring healthcare access is recognized and upheld as an ongoing policy priority.

Shamarial Roberson highlighted additional concerns regarding the burden placed on Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), noted challenges faced by rural residents currently served by the Bond Community Health Center, and emphasized the importance of considering ongoing changes within the insurance landscape.

*Temple Robinson moved, seconded by Darryl Jones, to direct staff to draft a proposed charter amendment affirming Leon County values access to primary care as a leading determinant of economic vitality and community well-being.*

*The motion carried 15 – 0 with Committee Members Joey Davis, Linda Bond Edwards, Liz Ellis, Slaton Murray, Sean Pittman and William Smith not present.*

Max Herrle asked what occurs when a vacancy arises on the Board of County Commissioners and requested information on the costs and benefits of holding a special election, noting that election costs could range from approximately \$150,000 to \$200,000.

County Attorney O'Steen responded that statutory requirements govern vacancy procedures and timelines and indicated that the issue is largely preempted by state law.

Ryan Ray raised concerns that existing districts, originally drawn to defend minority representation, have more recently resulted in limited representation of minorities among certain districts. He suggested consideration of electing all commissioners at-large.

Henry Lewis III responded that district-based elections have provided consistent representation for historically underrepresented communities and that maintaining both district and countywide perspectives has value.

Ryan Ray decided not to make a motion on this topic.

Chair Lindley noted that at-large elections typically involve higher campaign costs, which could deter potential candidates.

County Administrator Long advised that changes to the election structure would constitute a typical Charter issue for the Committee to consider.

Max Herrle referenced a Florida Statutes provision allowing counties to opt into supporting a property tax exemption for economic development projects, subject to renewal by the Board of County Commissioners every ten years.

*Max Herrle moved for an agenda item to be brought back on information related to Florida Statutes providing counties a local option property tax exemption to support economic development projects, subject to renewal by the Board of County Commissioners every ten years.*

*The motion failed for lack of a second.*

Darryl Jones asked if ensuring safe access to schools for children is a County priority or required by Florida Statutes.

County Administrator Long clarified that both are the case as the County secures state funding specifically to construct sidewalks in close proximity to public schools.

Chair Lindley thanked staff and reminded the Committee that there were three meetings remaining.

Nicki Hatch shared that the Inspector General agenda item would be provided during the February 5, 2026 CCRC meeting so that the proposer of the charter amendment, Dr. Howard Kessler, could be present.

**Motion to adjourn:**

*Max Herrle moved, seconded by Ryan Ray, to adjourn the meeting.*

*The motion carried 15 – 0 with Committee Members Joey Davis, Linda Bond Edwards, Liz Ellis, Slaton Murray, Sean Pittman and William Smith not present.*

Chair Lindley adjourned the meeting at 1:04 p.m.

ATTEST:

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Mary Ann Lindley, Chair  
Leon County Citizen Charter Review Committee

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Beryl Wood, Clerk to the Board for  
Gwen Marshall Knight, Clerk of Court

# **LEON COUNTY CITIZEN CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE**

## **RECEIPT AND FILE OF WRITTEN PUBLIC COMMENTS**

*(To be electronically distributed Wednesday before the meeting)*

# **LEON COUNTY CITIZEN CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE**

## **NOTES FOR AGENDA ITEM #1**

# Citizen Charter Review Committee

## Agenda Item #1

January 22, 2026

**To:** 2025-2026 Leon County Citizen Charter Review Committee

**From:** Vincent S. Long, County Administrator  
Chasity H. O'Steen, County Attorney

**Title:** Comparative Analysis of Bill of Rights Provisions in County Charters

<b>Review and Approval:</b>	Vincent S. Long, County Administrator Chasity H. O'Steen, County Attorney
<b>Department / Division Review:</b>	Ken Morris, Assistant County Administrator
<b>Lead Staff / Project Team:</b>	Nicki Hatch, Assistant to the County Administrator for Legislative and Strategic Initiatives

### Summary:

As requested by the Citizen Charter Review Committee, this item provides a comparative analysis of county charters that include a bill of rights.

### Staff Recommendation:

Option #1: Accept the report and take no further action.

## Report and Discussion

### **Background:**

At its December 4, 2025, meeting, the Citizen Charter Review Committee (Committee) requested information on charter counties that include a bill of rights. The topic was presented by member Max Herrle who distributed a proposed “Leon County Bill of Rights” for consideration (Attachment #1) and provided a copy of the Bill of Rights section from the Miami-Dade County Charter. This item provides a comparative analysis of bills of rights established in Florida county charters along with the utilization of county ordinances to further define and revise citizen rights to reflect evolving community needs.

### **Analysis:**

A local bill of rights expresses the fundamental values of a community and local government which can be codified by charter, ordinance, or resolution, to formally express a commitment to securing, protecting, and promoting such “rights” at the local level. A local bill of rights generally does not include specific enforcement, penalties, or remedies for violations of these rights. For local governments in Florida with a bill of rights, the rights are most commonly codified in county ordinances so that the language can be revisited and amended over time to reflect evolving community priorities. Only two counties, Broward and Miami-Dade, provide an extensive Bill of Rights section in their county charters. Orange and Pinellas Counties provide very broad concepts which are then further described in county ordinances, policies, and procedures. This allows the elected officials to modify the county ordinances and policies as needed to reflect emerging needs.

The Leon County Charter provides for the structure, organization, and authority of County government. The County Charter does not express specific policy priorities which are achieved through the Board’s strategic planning process, budgetary priorities, or policy and ordinance adoption. However, section 1 of the Charter provides a Preamble which affirms the broad values and beliefs of County residents as follows:

*We, the citizens of Leon County, Florida, united in the belief that **governmental decisions affecting local interests should be made locally**, rather than by the State, and that **County government should be reflective of the people of the County and should serve them in achieving a more responsive and efficient form of government** and in order to **empower the people of this County to make changes in their own government**, do ordain and establish this Home Rule Charter for Leon County, Florida. [emphasis added]*

The Preamble captures broad community values which emphasize the importance of home rule and governmental decisions being made at the local level as well as the role of residents in shaping their local government. The Preamble is intentionally broad so that the County can adapt and respond to new challenges as determined by the elected County Commission. Key provisions of the Preamble include:

- *County government should be reflective of the people:* This provision addresses representative government which, by definition, must be diverse and inclusive in order to reflect our community.

- *Should serve them in achieving a more responsive and efficient form of government:* This provision speaks to public service, fairness and equity in serving the community at large, and rising to the challenges of the day which requires flexibility.
- *Empower the people of this County to make changes in their own government:* This provision addresses the role of citizens to impose changes to the structure of their government including limiting or expanding the County's authority relative to its citizens and municipal governments.

The following summarizes county charter provisions related to citizen rights. Attachment #2 provides the full narrative from each of the respective charters:

- **Broward County:** Section 1.04 of the Broward County Charter – *Citizens' Bill of Rights* provides 16 rights to ensure “citizens protection against abuses and encroachments by County government and ensure all persons fair and equitable treatment.” It should be noted however, that the majority of these rights are provided under the U.S. Constitution, Florida Constitution, and/or federal and state law. The Broward County Bill of Rights include:
  - Access to government
  - Access to public records
  - Right to be heard
  - Right to notice
  - Protection of human rights
- **Miami-Dade County:** Following the Preamble in the Miami-Dade County Charter is a – *Citizens' Bill of Rights* – which provides 17 rights “in order to provide the public with full and accurate information, to promote efficient administrative management, to make government more accountable, and to ensure to all persons fair and equitable treatment.” Enumerated rights include:
  - Convenient access to government
  - Truth in government
  - Public records
  - Right to be heard
  - Right to notice

Similar to Broward County, the Miami-Dade Citizens' Bill of Rights mostly includes rights already provided under the U.S. Constitution, Florida Constitution, and/or federal and state law. One exception, however, includes the establishment of the Commission on Ethics and Public Trust by County Ordinance with the authority to render advisory opinions and enforce the County's Bill of Rights and Code of Ethics Ordinances. In addition, the Miami-Dade County Charter provides for remedies for violations. A citizen may bring a cause of action alleging a violation of the Bill of Rights in the Dade County Circuit Court and shall be entitled to recover costs as determined by the Court. Judicial remedies for violations of the rights are redundant as most of the Miami-Dade rights are provided in state and federal law and are subject to penalties associated with violations of those laws.

- **Orange County:** Section 106 of the Orange County Charter – *Security of the Citizens* - provides for the County to “use its powers to secure for all citizens by ordinance [emphasis added] or by civil or criminal action, whenever appropriate, the following:
  - Just and equitable taxation
  - Proper use of public property
  - Full disclosure of public records and proceeding
  - Prevention of abuse of the environment
  - The right to be heard and provide public input

All of these rights are provided for under the U.S. Constitution, Florida Constitution, and/or federal and state law. The Charter includes these very broad concepts which are then further described in county ordinances, policies, and procedures. This allows the elected officials to modify the county ordinances and policies as needed to reflect emerging needs. Furthermore, the Orange County Charter does not include specific enforcement, penalties, and remedies for violations of these rights.

- **Pinellas County:** Section 2.02 of the Pinellas County Charter – *Security of Rights of Citizens* – provides for the County to “use its powers to secure for all citizens by ordinance [emphasis added] or by civil or criminal action, whenever appropriate, the following:
  - Prohibition of conflict of interest
  - Just and equitable taxation while recognizing other local governments' jurisdictions to set their own millage
  - Public property
  - Public records
  - Protection of Human Rights
  - Protection of Consumer Rights.

Like Orange County, these concepts are enumerated in the Pinellas County Charter with the explicit intent to be further described in county ordinances, policies, and procedures so that they may be revised as needed. Further, all of these rights in the Pinellas County Charter are provided for under the U.S. Constitution, Florida Constitution, and/or federal and state law. The Pinellas County Charter does not include specific enforcement, penalties, and remedies for violations of these rights.

Local governments across the state (including Leon County) have also adopted citizens' rights provisions by ordinance or resolution – demonstrating that such provisions do not require an amendment to the County Charter. For example, in April 2022, Leon County's Resolution of Support for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted to express the County's commitment to ensuring the protection of human rights locally. The Board adopted Core Practices for Leon County Government reflect many of the “rights” provided in the four county charters. The County's Core Practices are as follows:

- **Delivering the “Wow” factor in Customer Service.** Employees deliver exemplary service with pride, passion and determination; anticipating and solving problems in “real time” and exceeding customer expectations. Customers know that they are the reason we are here.
- **Connecting with Citizens.** Employees go beyond customer service to community relevance, engaging citizens as stakeholders in the community’s success. Citizens know that they are part of the bigger cause.
- **Demonstrating Highest Standards of Public Service.** Employees adhere to the highest standards of ethical behavior, avoid circumstances that create even an appearance of impropriety and carry out the public’s business in a manner which upholds the public trust. Citizens know that we are on their side.
- **Accepting Accountability.** Employees are individually and collectively accountable for their performance, adapt to changing conditions and relentlessly pursue excellence beyond the current standard, while maintaining our core values.
- **Exhibiting Respect.** Employees exercise respect for citizens, community partners and each other.
- **Employing Team Approach.** Employees work together to produce bigger and better ideas, to seize the opportunities and to address the problems which face our community.
- **Exercising Responsible Stewardship of the Community’s Resources.** Employees engage in the continuous effort to create and sustain a place which attracts talent, fosters economic opportunity and offers an unmatched quality of life, demonstrating performance, value and results for our citizenry.
- **Living our “People Focused, Performance Driven” Culture.** Employees have a structure in place to live all of this as our organizational culture and are empowered to help the people they serve.

We Believe In:

- Demonstrating to our citizens that we are on their side, letting them know that they are the reason we exist and what they are getting for their tax dollars;
- Producing bigger and better ideas to address the real issues facing our community;
- Actively promoting transparency, accessibility, and openness in everything we do;
- Engaging citizens in important decisions facing the community;
- Tirelessly enhancing our community’s livability, sustainability and economic competitiveness; and providing employees a structure which reinforces this as our organizational culture and employs and empowers them to help people.

The vast majority of the rights established under existing county charters include protections that are already provided under the U.S. Constitution, Florida Constitution, and/or federal and state law. It should be noted, however, that any citizens rights established under a county charter cannot conflict with or seek to regulate areas preempted by the U.S. Constitution, Florida Constitution, and/or federal and state law. This may include the regulation of clean air, qualifications to vote and participate in government, and the operational autonomy of constitutional officers.

The Committee may wish to formally establish citizen rights (beyond those already provided by state and federal law), and direct staff to prepare a charter amendment to incorporate such language under the Charter Preamble. Alternatively, the Committee could provide a policy recommendation to the Board recommending adoption of an ordinance enumerating such rights which would not require a charter amendment and could be revised in the future to reflect changing community needs.

**Options:**

1. Accept the report and take no further action.
2. Direct staff to prepare a charter amendment providing a Bill of Rights for Leon County citizens.
3. Direct staff to prepare a recommendation for the Board to consider adopting a County Ordinance providing a Bill of Rights for Leon County citizens.
4. Committee Direction.

**Recommendation:**

Option #1

**Attachments:**

1. Leon County Bill of Rights Proposal, Previously Distributed by Member Max Herrle
2. Provisions in County Charters Regarding Citizens' Rights

<p><b>Unofficial Leon County Charter Review Committee Suggestions Leon County, Florida, November 6th, 2025</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Instructions: As we move through the following year, I'd like to share some initial ideas on things I'm particularly interested in hearing the group's thoughts on.</li></ul>		<p><b>Max Herrle</b> <a href="mailto:max@northflorida.com">max@northflorida.com</a> <b>850-508-5841</b></p>																				
<p><b>Amendments 1-2 modify existing language within the charter.</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>Question 1: County Administrator Selection Basic Majority Change</b> Modifying Section 2.3 (1) (A) of the Leon County charter, striking the words "plus one (1)" in the first and second sentences?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No</p>	<p><b>Amendments 3-4 add additional dedicated subsections to the charter.</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>Question 2: County Commissioner Compensation</b> A discussion around County Commissioner compensation, Section 2.2(3).</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No</p> <hr/> <p><b>Question 3: Creating a County Funding Mechanism for Affordable Housing Programs</b> A conversation about potential ideas for amendments that seek to enable county government to establish a funding mechanism to fund affordable housing programs.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No</p> <hr/> <p><b>Question 4: Creating a County Funding Mechanism for Fire Services</b> A conversation about potential ideas for amendments that seek to enable the county government or a fire control district to establish a new or revised balanced funding mechanism to fund city or city and county fire services.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No</p>	<p><b>Question 5: Leon County Bill of Rights</b> Shall the Leon County Charter be amended to establish the Leon County Bill of Rights, value statements about the county and its people?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No</p> <p><b>Leon County Bill of Rights</b></p> <table border="0"><tr><td>I.</td><td>Every person has the right to peace, privacy, and safety within their home and community.</td><td>VI.</td><td>The government of Leon County exists to serve, not to rule, and its officers remain answerable to the public trust.</td></tr><tr><td>II.</td><td>People are entitled to know how their government acts in their name, and to question it without fear.</td><td>VII.</td><td>The future of the county belongs equally to those born here and those who have chosen to make this their home.</td></tr><tr><td>III.</td><td>People are entitled to the quiet enjoyment of Leon County's clean air, clean water, and natural Canopy.</td><td>VIII.</td><td>Public safety shall be pursued with fairness, transparency, and respect for human life and dignity.</td></tr><tr><td>IV.</td><td>People shall have access to information that concerns their welfare, and the means to speak and be heard.</td><td>IX.</td><td>Every generation holds a duty to protect our community's freedom, beauty, and opportunity for the next.</td></tr><tr><td>V.</td><td>No person shall be deprived of dignity by neglect, discrimination, or unnecessary surveillance.</td><td>X.</td><td>These rights belong to all who dwell within Leon County, and no law or ordinance shall be construed to abridge them.</td></tr></table>	I.	Every person has the right to peace, privacy, and safety within their home and community.	VI.	The government of Leon County exists to serve, not to rule, and its officers remain answerable to the public trust.	II.	People are entitled to know how their government acts in their name, and to question it without fear.	VII.	The future of the county belongs equally to those born here and those who have chosen to make this their home.	III.	People are entitled to the quiet enjoyment of Leon County's clean air, clean water, and natural Canopy.	VIII.	Public safety shall be pursued with fairness, transparency, and respect for human life and dignity.	IV.	People shall have access to information that concerns their welfare, and the means to speak and be heard.	IX.	Every generation holds a duty to protect our community's freedom, beauty, and opportunity for the next.	V.	No person shall be deprived of dignity by neglect, discrimination, or unnecessary surveillance.	X.	These rights belong to all who dwell within Leon County, and no law or ordinance shall be construed to abridge them.
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## County Charters with Bill of Rights Provisions

### **Broward**

#### *Sec. 1.04. – Citizens' bill of rights*

The citizens of the County establish this County government in order to protect and serve the citizens of the County. In order to secure to the County's citizens protection against abuses and encroachments by County government, and to ensure all persons fair and equitable treatment, the following rights are guaranteed:

- (A) *Access to Government.* Each Person has the right to transact business with the County with a minimum of personal inconvenience. It is the duty of the County to provide reasonably convenient times and places for transacting business with the County.
- (B) *Truth in Government.* Each Person has the right to truthful and accurate information from Commissioners and County employees. Commissioners and County employees shall not knowingly omit any information or significant facts when disseminating public information.
- (C) *Public Records.* Each Person has a right to access County records. All audits, reports, minutes, documents and other County public records shall be open for public inspection at reasonable times and places.
- (D) *Right to be Heard.* Any Person has the right to appear before the County Commission, a Board, or Committee for the presentation, adjustment or determination of an issue, matter or request within the County's jurisdiction. Matters shall be scheduled for the convenience of the public, and specific portions of each agenda shall provide for designated times so that the public may know when a matter may be heard. The County may establish reasonable procedures relating to public hearings, including limitations on the time members of the public may speak on an issue.
- (E) *Right to Notice.* The County shall provide timely notice to Persons entitled to notice of a hearing before the County Commission, Board, or Committee. The notice shall include the time, place and nature of the scheduled hearing, and the legal authority which forms the basis for the hearing. The County shall provide copies of proposed ordinances and resolutions at a reasonable time prior to the hearing, unless the matter involves the adoption of an emergency ordinance or resolution.
- (F) *Right to Notice of Decision and Reasons.* The County, if requested, shall provide members of the public notice of the County's denial of a Person's request made in connection with any County decision or proceeding. A statement indicating the grounds for denial shall accompany the notice provided by the County.

(G) *Right to County Administrator's Report.* The public is entitled to a status report, on a periodic basis, from the County Administrator on all major matters which are either still pending or have been concluded.

(H) *Right to Public Budget Process.* The County Administrator shall annually prepare a budget which illustrates the cost of each County program. Prior to the County Commission's first public hearing on a proposed budget, the County Administrator shall publish a budget summary which sets forth the proposed cost of each individual program, all major proposed increases and decreases in funding and personnel for each County program, the reasons for any increase or decrease, the estimated millage cost of each program, and the amount of any contingency and carryover funds for each program.

(I) *Right to a Management Report on the Performance of County Government.* The public is entitled to have access to a Management Report published by the County Administrator, and made public on a quarterly basis, detailing the performance of the County government offices, divisions and departments. The Management Report shall include, but not be limited to, a report on the receipt and expenditure of County funds by each County office, division and department, and a report of the expected and actual performance of the activities of each County office, division and department.

(J) *Right to Prohibit Conflicts of Interest and the Implementation of a Code of Conduct.* The County Commission shall enact, by ordinance, a conflict of interest section in the County Code that requires Commissioners, County employees, and individuals appointed to Boards, Committees, Agencies, and Authorities to avoid even the appearance of impropriety in the performance of their duties and responsibilities. The County Commission shall also enact, by ordinance, a Code of Official Conduct that shall apply to Commissioners, County employees, and individuals appointed to Boards, Committees, Agencies, and Authorities. In the ordinances enacted pursuant to this subsection, the County Commission shall provide procedures for the examination of matters related to the conduct of Commissioners, County employees, and individuals appointed to Boards, Committees, Agencies, and Authorities. The ordinances enacted pursuant to this subsection shall also provide procedures for the removal of an employee or individual, other than a Commissioner.

(K) *Just and Equitable Taxation.* The County shall prevent the imposition of any tax within the County in excess of the limitations imposed by Article VII, Section 9, of the Florida Constitution or by the laws of the State of Florida.

(L) *Proper Use of Public Property.* The County shall prevent the use of public property or its taxing power for the benefit of private individuals, partnerships or corporations, in violation of the restrictions imposed by Article VII, Section 10, of the Florida Constitution, or by the laws of the State of Florida.

(M) *Power of Recall.* The public shall have the power to recall any Commissioner in accordance with the laws of the State of Florida.

(N) *Protection of Human Rights.* The County shall establish provisions, for protection of citizen human rights from discrimination based upon religion, political affiliation, race, color, age, gender, disability, familial status, marital status, or national origin by providing and ensuring equal rights and opportunities for all citizens of the County.

(O) *Protection of Consumer Rights.* The County shall enact ordinances for protection of citizen consumer rights from unfair trade practices by all Persons.

(P) *Sustainable Environment.* Broward County shall enact ordinances which protect its citizens' right to a sustainable environment, including clean air and clean water, while encouraging the stewardship of natural resources.

All provisions of this Article shall be construed to be supplementary to and not in conflict with the laws of the State of Florida. If any part of this Article shall be declared invalid, such invalidity shall not affect the validity of the remaining provisions.

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## **Miami-Dade**

### *Citizens' Bill of Rights (included after Preamble)*

(A) This government has been created to protect the governed, not the governing. In order to provide the public with full and accurate information, to promote efficient administrative management, to make government more accountable, and to ensure to all persons fair and equitable treatment, the following rights are guaranteed:

(1) *Convenient Access.* Every person has the right to transact business with the County and the municipalities with a minimum of personal inconvenience. It shall be the duty of the Mayor and the Commission to provide, within the County's budget limitations, reasonably convenient times and places for registration and voting, for required inspections, and for transacting business with the County.

(2) *Truth in Government.* No County or municipal official or employee shall knowingly furnish false information on any public matter, nor knowingly omit significant facts when giving requested information to members of the public.

(3) *Public Records.* All audits, reports, minutes, documents and other public records of the County and the municipalities and their boards, agencies, departments and authorities shall be open for inspection and copying, consistent with the requirements of the State of Florida's public records laws, at reasonable times and places convenient to the public.

(4) *Minutes and Ordinance Register.* The Clerk of the Commission and of each municipal council shall maintain and make available for public inspection an ordinance register separate from the minutes showing the votes of each member on all ordinances and resolutions listed by descriptive title. Written minutes of all meetings and the ordinance register shall be available for public inspection not later than 30 days after the conclusion of the meeting.

(5) *Right to be Heard.* So far as the orderly conduct of public business permits, any interested person has the right to appear before the Commission or any municipal council or any County or municipal agency, board or department for the presentation, adjustment or determination of an issue, request or controversy within the jurisdiction of the governmental entity involved; provided, nothing herein shall prohibit the Commission or any municipal council from referring a matter to a committee of each of their respective bodies to conduct a public hearing, unless prohibited by law. Matters shall be scheduled for the convenience of the public, and the agenda shall be divided into approximate time periods so that the public may know approximately when a matter will be heard. Nothing herein shall prohibit any governmental entity or agency from imposing reasonable time limits for the presentation of a matter.

(6) *Right to Notice.* Persons entitled to notice of a County or municipal hearing shall be timely informed as to the time, place and nature of the hearing and the legal authority pursuant to

which the hearing is to be held. Failure by an individual to receive such notice shall not constitute mandatory grounds for cancelling the hearing or rendering invalid any determination made at such hearing. Copies of proposed ordinances or resolutions shall be made available at a reasonable time prior to the hearing, unless the matter involves an emergency ordinance or resolution.

(7) *No Unreasonable Postponements.* No matter once having been placed on a formal agenda by the County or any municipality shall be postponed to another day except for good cause shown in the opinion of the County Commission, the municipal council or other governmental entity or agency conducting such meeting, and then only on condition that any person so requesting is mailed adequate notice of the new date of any postponed meeting. Failure by an individual to receive such notice shall not constitute mandatory grounds for cancelling the hearing or rendering invalid any determination made at such hearing.

(8) *Right to Public Hearing.* Upon a timely request of any interested party a public hearing shall be held by any County or municipal agency, board, department or authority upon any significant policy decision to be issued by it which is not subject to subsequent administrative or legislative review and hearing. This provision shall not apply to the Law Department of the County or of any municipality, nor to any body whose duties and responsibilities are solely advisory. At any zoning or other hearing in which review is exclusively by certiorari, a party or his counsel shall be entitled to present his case or defense by oral or documentary evidence, to submit rebuttal evidence, and to conduct such cross-examination as may be required for a full and true disclosure of the facts. The decision of any such agency, board, department or authority must be based upon the facts in the record. Procedural rules establishing reasonable time and other limitations may be promulgated and amended from time to time.

(9) *Notice of Actions and Reasons.* Prompt notice shall be given of the denial in whole or in part of a request of an interested person made in connection with any County or municipal administrative decision or proceeding when the decision is reserved at the conclusion of the hearing. The notice shall be accompanied by a statement of the grounds for denial.

(10) *Mayor's, City Managers' and Attorneys' Reports.* The County Mayor and County Attorney and each City Manager and City Attorney shall periodically make a public status report on all major matters pending or concluded within their respective jurisdictions.

(11) *Budgeting.* In addition to any budget required by state statute, the County Mayor shall prepare a budget showing the cost of each program for each budget year. Prior to the County Commission's first public hearing on the proposed budget required by state law, the County Mayor shall make public a budget summary setting forth the proposed cost of each individual program and reflecting all major proposed increases and decreases in funds and personnel for each program, the purposes therefore, the estimated millage cost of each program and the amount of any contingency and carryover funds for each program.

(12) *Quarterly Budget Comparisons.* The County Mayor shall make public a quarterly report showing the actual expenditures during the quarter just ended against one quarter of the proposed annual expenditures set forth in the budget. Such report shall also reflect the same cumulative information for whatever portion of the fiscal year that has elapsed.

(13) *Adequate Audits.* An annual audit of the County and each municipality shall be made by an independent certified public accounting firm in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards. A summary of the results, including any deficiencies found, shall be made public. In making such audit, proprietary functions shall be audited separately and adequate depreciation on proprietary facilities shall be accrued so the public may determine the amount of any direct or indirect subsidy.

(14) *Regional Offices.* Regional offices of the County's administrative services shall be maintained at locations in the County for the convenience of the residents.

(15) *Financial Disclosure.* The Commission shall by ordinance make provision for the filing under oath or affirmation by all County and municipal elective officials, candidates for County and municipal elective offices, such employees as may be designated by ordinance, and such other public officials, and outside consultants who receive funds from the County or municipalities, within the County and who may legally be included, of personal financial statements, copies of personal Federal income tax returns, or itemized source of income statements. Provision shall be made for preparing and keeping such reports current from time to time, and for public disclosure. The Commission shall also make provision for the filing annually under oath of a report by fulltime County and municipal employees of all outside employment and amounts received therefrom. The Mayor and any City Manager may require monthly reports from individual employees or groups of employees for good cause.

(16) *Representation of Public.* The Commission shall endeavor to provide representation at all proceedings significantly affecting the County and its residents before State and Federal regulatory bodies.

(17) *Commission on Ethics and Public Trust.* The County shall, by ordinance, establish an independent Commission on Ethics and Public Trust comprised of five members, not appointed by the County Commission, with the authority to review, interpret, render advisory opinions and enforce the county and municipal code of ethics ordinances, conflict of interest ordinances, lobbyist registration and reporting ordinances, ethical campaign practices ordinances, when enacted, and citizens' bill of rights.

(B) The foregoing enumeration of citizens' rights vests large and pervasive powers in the citizenry of Dade County. Such power necessarily carries with it responsibility of equal magnitude for the successful operation of government in the County. The orderly, efficient and fair operation of government requires the intelligent participation of individual citizens exercising their rights with dignity and restraint so as to avoid any sweeping acceleration in the cost of government because

of the exercise of individual prerogatives, and for individual citizens to grant respect for the dignity of public office.

(C) *Remedies for Violations.* A citizen may bring a cause of action alleging a violation of this Article filed in the Dade County Circuit Court pursuant to its general equity jurisdiction and if successful, shall be entitled to recover costs as fixed by the Court. The Commission on Ethics and Public Trust may also enforce the provisions of this Article and may impose any penalty authorized by County Code not otherwise prohibited by a collective bargaining agreement, for a violation of this Article. Any penalty imposed by the Commission on Ethics and Public Trust pursuant to this subsection may be enforced in the Miami-Dade County Circuit Court.

(D) *Construction.* All provisions of this Article shall be construed to be supplementary to and not in conflict with the general laws of Florida. If any part of this Article shall be declared invalid, it shall not affect the validity of the remaining provisions.

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## **Orange**

### *Sec. 106. – Security of the citizens*

The Charter form of government protects and serves the citizens of the county. In order to secure to the citizens of the county protection against abuses and encroachments, the county shall use its powers to secure for all citizens by ordinance or by civil or criminal action, whenever appropriate, the following:

- (A) Just and equitable taxation.
- (B) Proper use of public property.
- (C) Full disclosure of public records and proceedings.
- (D) Prevention of abuse of the environment.
- (E) The right to be heard and provide public input.

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## **Pinellas**

### *Sec. 2.02. – Security of rights of citizens*

In order to secure protection to the citizens of the county against abuses and encroachments, the county shall use its powers, whenever appropriate, to provide by ordinance or to seek remedy by civil or criminal action for the following:

- (A) *Prohibition of conflict of interest.* The board of county commissioners shall enact a conflict of interest ordinance pertaining to all elected officials, appointed officials, and all employees of said officials of Pinellas County government, within ninety (90) days after the effective date of the Charter. By said ordinance the board shall be empowered to institute procedures by which any such official may be removed from office, except for those officers for which removal is provided under the state constitution.
- (B) *Just and equitable taxation while recognizing other local governments' jurisdictions to set their own millage.* The grant of the powers contained herein shall not be construed in any way to allow the county to claim any portion of any city's ten-mill taxing power.
- (C) *[Public property.]* Proper use of public property belonging to Pinellas County government.
- (D) *[Public records.]* Full access to public records and proceedings of Pinellas County government.
- (E) *Protection of human rights.* The county shall establish provisions, pursuant to state and federal law, for protection of human rights from discrimination based upon religion, political affiliation, race, color, age, sex, or national origin by providing and ensuring equal rights and opportunities for all people of Pinellas County.
- (F) *Protection of consumer rights.* The county shall establish provisions for the protection of consumers.

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# **LEON COUNTY CITIZEN CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE**

## **NOTES FOR AGENDA ITEM #2**

# Citizen Charter Review Committee

## Agenda Item #2

January 22, 2026

**To:** 2025-2026 Leon County Citizen Charter Review Committee

**From:** Vincent S. Long, County Administrator

**Title:** Considerations for Addressing Poverty and Racial Inequity in the County Charter



<b>Review and Approval:</b>	Vincent S. Long, County Administrator
<b>Department / Division Review:</b>	Ken Morris, Assistant County Administrator Shington Lamy, Assistant County Administrator
<b>Lead Staff / Project Team:</b>	Abigail Thomas, Director, Office of Human Services and Community Partnerships

### Summary:

At its December 4, 2025 meeting, the Citizen Charter Review Committee requested an agenda item to consider amending the Leon County Charter to address communities and neighborhoods impacted by poverty and racial inequities. This item provides the requested analysis including information on the County's ongoing efforts to address poverty and historic inequity through programs, policies and partnerships in the community.

### Staff Recommendation:

Option #1: Accept the report on Leon County's commitment and ongoing efforts to tackle poverty and historic inequities in the community.

## Report and Discussion

### **Background:**

At its December 4, 2025 meeting, the Citizen Charter Review Committee (Committee) requested an agenda item to consider amending the Leon County Charter to address communities and neighborhoods impacted by poverty and racial inequities. This item provides the requested analysis including information on the County's ongoing efforts to address poverty and historic inequity through programs, policies and partnerships in the community.

During the December 4th meeting, Dr. Bruce Strouble distributed a handout that proposed the establishment of a new section in the County Charter that would require the County to establish programs and funds based on communities that have experienced historic racial discrimination (Attachment #1). Subsequently, the Committee requested an agenda item to further consider the proposal for a potential charter amendment. The principal tenets of the proposal, as described further in the Analysis section, are as follows:

- *Acknowledgment of historic local and state policies that created “generational disadvantage to specific communities” which the proposal identifies as black residents and neighborhoods.*
- *Conduct periodic historical disparity audits to identify geographic areas where historic public policies (i.e., slavery, Jim Crow segregation, redlining, etc.) presently produce inequities.*
- *Establish a Community Restoration Fund dedicated to investing exclusively in areas identified in the audit. Investment would include infrastructure, housing stabilization, environmental remediation, neighborhood revitalization, community wealth-building & economic mobility programs, and community healing.*
- *Ensure County budgets, planning documents, and capital projects include a clear framework for reducing disparities identified in the audits.*
- *Prioritize access to County-owned lands for historically burdened communities for agriculture, housing, cooperatives, and restorative development.*

The primary goal of the proposed charter amendment is to provide exclusive resources and services to neighborhoods that experienced past and historic racial discrimination in the community (i.e., slavery, Jim Crow, etc.). However, recent and ongoing state and federal efforts have sought to prohibit the adoption and implementation of policies, programs, and services that seek to address historic racial disenfranchisement or diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Some federal agencies now require state and local governments to certify that they do not operate any programs that advance or promote DEI as a condition to receive federal grant funding which has led to the suspension and elimination of said programs.

As presented in the item, Leon County currently has a long history of working to reduce poverty and inequity in the community. The County regularly utilizes empirical data developed by federal and state agencies such as the U.S. Census, Shimberg Center for Housing Studies, and the Florida Department of Health to identify, engage, and invest in local neighborhoods that have historically

experienced poverty. As a result, since 2021, the County has strengthened its efforts to address poverty through the investment of more than \$34 million in human services programs, healthcare, housing, and economic development, to improve the lives of residents in neighborhoods such as Bond, Frenchtown, Griffin Heights, and South City. At the same time, the County has dedicated \$319 million through the Blueprint Intergovernmental Agency (Blueprint) on infrastructure investments in high poverty neighborhoods.

As requested by the Committee, an analysis of Dr. Strouble's proposal is provided along with greater detail on the County's efforts to reduce poverty in neighborhoods based on empirical data and community needs. This includes information on recent and ongoing state and federal efforts to prohibit the adoption and implementation of policies, programs, and services based on historic racial disenfranchisement, diversity, equity, and inclusion. With exception to the narrowly tailored Minority and Women Business Enterprise program explained later in this item, County's programs and services are not specific to, or solely intended for, historically disenfranchised populations. However, the programs often support residents and areas of the County generally considered historically disenfranchised.

The County has been successful in addressing poverty and inequities in accordance with state and federal laws and without an amendment to the County Charter. Adopting a charter amendment to establish programs and funding based on historic racial disenfranchisement could put the County's federal and state funding in jeopardy, as well as pose legal challenges to the County that are presented in the Analysis. Therefore, it is recommended that the Committee not pursue a charter amendment. Alternatively, the Committee may wish to provide a policy recommendation to the Board encouraging the continuation of the County's long-standing commitment to reducing poverty in the community. The recommendation would be included as part of the Committee's report for Board consideration.

### **Analysis:**

The Leon County Charter provides for the structure, organization, and authority of County government. The County Charter does not express specific policy priorities which are achieved through the Board's strategic planning process, budgetary priorities, or policy and ordinance adoption. However, this item provides the requested analysis for the Committee to consider addressing poverty and racial inequities through the County Charter as well as information on the County's ongoing efforts to address these issues through programs, policies and partnerships in the community.

The County utilizes empirical data developed by federal and state agencies to identify, engage, and invest in local neighborhoods that have historically experienced poverty. A variety of data regularly identify the census tracts of Frenchtown and Griffin Heights, located in the 32304 zip code, as high poverty neighborhoods. In September 2025, the Board was provided a report that detailed the County's efforts to address poverty and inequities in the community with an emphasis on the 32304 zip code (Attachment #2). The report commenced with data that indicated 32304 has the following:

- The highest poverty rate in the community (49.4% compared to 18.1% countywide)
- The lowest homeownership rate (13% compared to 52% countywide)
- The highest uninsured rate (12.9% compared to 7.7% countywide)
- One of the lowest median household incomes (\$30,823 compared to \$66,000 countywide)
- One of the highest unemployment rates (8% compared to 4.4% countywide)

In addition to Frenchtown and Griffin Heights, the neighborhoods and census tracts with poverty rates higher than the County average include: Bond, Providence, and South City. The neighborhoods are all located within the City of Tallahassee (City) limits. As a result, the County regularly collaborates with the City and other local partners to develop, fund, and support a variety of programs, services, events, and initiatives to address poverty and inequity in the neighborhoods.

The County actively supports the implementation of the City's Neighborhood First Program which aims to reduce crime, enhance quality of life, and increase economic prosperity in Bond, Frenchtown, Griffin Heights, Providence, and South City. While the efforts do not specifically focus on racial inequities, the neighborhoods have a higher population of minorities compared to the overall County population. Additionally, 75% of residents served by human service agencies through the County and City's Community Human Services Partnership program live in these neighborhoods. Therefore, the programs and services presented in the following section provide critical resources in the neighborhoods with the highest minority populations in the community.

#### County Efforts to Reduce Poverty and Inequities

Leon County currently has a long history of working to reduce poverty and inequity in the community. The following highlights the County's ongoing efforts to improve the lives of residents in neighborhoods that have historically experienced poverty and inequities through human services, healthcare, housing, economic development, and infrastructure improvements. Further details are provided in Attachment #2, which includes the report that was provided to the Board in September 2025.

#### *Human Services*

Leon County has been steadfast in its commitment and investment in human service programs that improve the quality of life of our residents. Over the past several years, the County has strengthened efforts in neighborhoods that have historically experienced poverty, including in the 32304 zip code, by expanding access to human services through the following:

- In 2019, the County, in partnership with the City, established the Community Human Services Partnership (CHSP) Promise Zone Category which invests \$1.1 million each funding cycle to provide direct services such as food, legal aid, after school care, and healthcare to high poverty neighborhoods. For more than 30 years, the County and City have planned, coordinated, and invested in human services through CHSP, which utilizes a competitive grant process to fund essential human services programs delivered by local not-for-profit organizations.

- Over the past several years, the County and City have partnered with Second Harvest of the Big Bend (Second Harvest) to install four temperature-controlled 24/7 food lockers at Good News Outreach in Frenchtown, Neighborhood Medical Center on South Monroe, Hartsfield Elementary School, and Sabal Palm Elementary School. The lockers have distributed over 17,000 meals to more than 3,200 residents.
- In 2024, the County expanded its partnership with 2-1-1 Big Bend to provide annual direct funding in the amount of \$112,500 for the 24-hour Helpline and the Lyft transportation program to address the need for greater knowledge of available resources and transportation. According to 2-1-1, over 4,000 Lyft rides were coordinated in FY 2025. Residents of the 32304 zip code accounted for nearly 830 Lyft rides (22%), the second highest of any zip code behind 32301. Further, the 32304 zip code continues to represent the largest share (31%) of 2-1-1 Helpline call volume.

### *Healthcare Services*

As presented earlier, residents of the 32304 zip code are most likely to be uninsured in the community. For over two decades, the County has led the effort to ensure residents have access to high quality health care through the following:

- The County invests over \$1.75 million annually through the Healthcare Services Program (i.e., CareNet) to provide primary care, dental care, mental health services, assistance with prescription medications, and specialty care to uninsured residents. The County partners with Apalachee Center, Bond Community Health Center (Bond), Neighborhood Medical Center (NMC), FAMU Pharmacy, and WeCare. As reported by the healthcare partners, 32304 residents represent the highest percentage of patients served (30%) in the community.
- The County partners with Bond and NMC to provide primary care, dental care, and health screenings through the mobile health units. The mobile units regularly visit Springfield Apartments in Griffin Heights, Walker Ford Community Center in the Bond Community, and other community hubs to expand access to health care services. Mobile units provide health care services two to three times per week, and at least two Saturdays a month throughout Leon County.

### *Affordable Housing*

Access to safe and affordable housing is another critical tool in addressing poverty and inequity. Homeownership is the primary vehicle for wealth creation and promotes neighborhood stability and therefore the County has taken the following actions:

- In 2019, the County, in partnership with the City, established the Tallahassee-Leon County Community Land Trust (CLT) through the Tallahassee Lenders' Consortium to construct new homes for low-income households that will remain affordable in perpetuity. As part of the partnership, the County donates properties deemed suitable for affordable housing to the CLT to construct new homes. The CLT has completed eight homes thus far on County donated land, including four homes in Griffin Heights.

- In 2022, the County entered into an interlocal agreement with the City to utilize County State Housing Initiative Partnership (SHIP) funds to invest in the construction of new homes in Neighborhood First Program neighborhoods. As a result, the County has invested more than \$900,000 for the construction of 13 homes with County SHIP funds in Neighborhood First communities, including six recently completed homes in the Providence and Griffin Heights neighborhoods.
- In 2025, the County contracted with Legal Services of North Florida in the amount of \$50,000 annually to provide legal assistance to help low-income families clear title and resolve heirs' property issues, which is anticipated to serve 20 families annually with a focus on high poverty neighborhoods.

Additionally, the highest affordable housing need in the community is affordable rental units for very low-income households. As a result, the County has invested a majority of its affordable housing funds for rental development over the previous five years within 32304 and other zip codes with high poverty rates. Such investments include:

- \$5.8 million in direct funding and more than \$198 million in bonding for affordable housing rental projects in high poverty communities that have or will build more than 1,200 units within the next 12 to 18 months (Attachment #3).
- \$500,000 annually in affordable rental development for very-low and extremely-low income households which includes residents in the 32304 zip code through the combination of SHIP, general revenue, and the County's portion of the newly established affordable housing program in the Office of Economic Vitality (OEV).
- \$175,000 to the Tallahassee Housing Authority to develop a master plan for the Springfield Apartments in Griffin Heights.

#### *Financial Empowerment and Economic Development*

As presented earlier, unemployment in high poverty neighborhoods is higher than the Countywide average. In addition, businesses in the neighborhoods report a lack of access to capital due to limited banking institutions in their communities. As a result, the County has taken considerable action to address the disparities, including the following:

- Partnering with FAMU Federal Credit Union in 2021 to establish the SmartSteps Microloan Program to provide financial capital to historically marginalized entrepreneurs to build their businesses. The County allocated \$2.5 million to establish the program, with FAMU Federal Credit Union contributing a \$250,000 match. To date, SmartSteps has distributed over \$1 million in microloans to 51 Black, minority, and women-owned businesses. Approximately 36% of loans have gone to businesses located in 32304, more than any other zip code. As a revolving loan program, repaid funds are reinvested to support additional MWSBE businesses.
- Ongoing partnership with Tallahassee State College (TSC) to support the emergency medical technician (EMT) program, including the dual enrollment program located on the campus of Godby High School which is the primary high school for the 32304 zip code. This program provides students in 32304 with the skills and professional certification to

work as an EMT upon graduation. Since the program launched in 2023, 23 students have completed the training with an additional 10 students currently enrolled for the 2025-2026 school year.

- Partnering with the Capital City Chamber of Commerce (Capital City Chamber) in 2022 to support the Bank On Tallahassee Initiative which improves access to banks and credit unions for low-income households and helps reduce barriers for households with previous credit issues. This led to the development of a Financial Empowerment Blueprint approved by the Board (Attachment #4) that memorializes the County's ongoing efforts to spur economic growth in neighborhoods that have historically experienced poverty.

#### *MWSBE Program*

In addition to programs addressing the human services and financial empowerment needs in the community, the County has long operated a narrowly defined race- and gender-based Minority and Women Business Enterprise (MWBE) program to enhance procurement opportunities with the County for small businesses. The program provides an incentive for small businesses to access County procurement opportunities within certain contracting categories (construction, architecture & engineering, professional services, materials and supplies) where minority- and women-owned businesses have historically been underrepresented in the procurement process so long as there is sufficient availability of said businesses to compete for County contracts. Today, the program operates as a joint office of the County and City under the Office of Economic Vitality.

The MWBE program operates based on the legal defensibility of a disparity study prepared by a third-party which must demonstrate factual predicate evidence of significant disparity and the program must be narrowly tailored to satisfy the legal foundation for administering a race- and gender-based procurement program. Based on the market data provided by the disparity study, the program assigns aspirational goals for contracting with MWBEs by procurement category. The aspirational goals cannot be mandated by the County. The following represents the latest annual reporting figures from FY 2024 on the County's MWBE utilization:

- The County spent approximately \$2.2 million with minority-owned vendors which was 148% of the aspirational goal as determined by the disparity study.
- The County spent approximately \$7.5 million with women-owned vendors which was 579% of the aspirational goal as determined by the disparity study.

#### *Infrastructure Investments*

Investment in infrastructure is also essential to the quality of life and economic prosperity in neighborhoods and communities that have historically experienced poverty and inequities. Therefore, the County and City have made significant infrastructure investments in zip codes with the highest poverty rates through Blueprint. In fact, 20 of the 32 Blueprint projects (62%) planned or underway are local in 32301, 32303, 32304, and 32305, for a total investment of \$319 million.

As provided in the September 2025 report to the Board (Attachment #2), these projects include:

- \$23 million for the construction of the Magnolia Drive Trail that builds sidewalks, installs underground electric utilities, connects South City and surrounding neighborhoods to public transit and employment centers.
- \$20 million for stormwater improvements, multi-use trails, and community space that will connect the Bond, Callen, Liberty Park, Lee Manor, and Providence neighborhoods.
- \$9 million for the Orange-Meridian Placemaking project which is constructing a new park on the Southside while improving stormwater drainage.
- More than \$1.5 million for the ongoing development of the South City Transit Center and improvements in the South City neighborhood.

These projects reflect the County's commitment to identify and engage the neighborhoods and make critical investments that improve the quality of life and economic prosperity for the residents.

#### Analysis of Proposed Leon County Charter Amendment

As demonstrated, the County has a long and ongoing history of reducing poverty and inequity in the community. These efforts do not require an amendment to the County Charter. As mentioned earlier, the Committee requested further analysis to consider Dr. Strouble's proposal that would create a new section in the County Charter that requires the County to establish programs and funds based on communities that have experienced historic racial discrimination. The following presents the specifics of the proposal and reiterates the policies, programs, services, and investment that align with the proposal that are already being implemented by the County:

*Acknowledgment of historic local and state policies that created “generational disadvantage to specific communities” which the proposal identifies as black residents and neighborhoods.*

On February 20, 2024, the Board adopted a resolution to acknowledge and apologize for the history of slavery and racism in Leon County (Attachment #5). Resolution 24-11 acknowledges racial inequities that occurred in the County and provides an apology for “the enslavement and segregation of African Americans in the community. The Resolution expressed the Board’s commitment to acknowledge and remember the errors that took place while also celebrating the strides that our community has made toward racial equality. It is important to note that the Board of County Commissioners did not have a policy making role in many of these historic inequities such as the segregation of schools, land use decisions within the City limits, lending decisions by private institutions, or operational control of law enforcement actions. However, as detailed throughout this analysis, the County has intentionally led the effort to respond to the impact of racial inequities on poverty in the community.

*Conduct periodic historical disparity audits to identify geographic areas where historic public policies (i.e., slavery, Jim Crow segregation, redlining, etc.) presently produce inequities.*

The County regularly conducts data driven analysis to respond to the most pressing needs in the community, including poverty and inequity. The County utilizes empirical data developed by federal and state agencies such as the U.S. Census, Shimberg Center for Housing Studies, and the

Florida Department of Health to identify, engage, and invest in local neighborhoods that have historically experienced poverty. As mentioned earlier, the data has identified neighborhoods such as Bond, Frenchtown, Griffin Heights, and South City with: the highest poverty rates, median household income below the County average, high percentage of residents without a high school diploma, and zoned for schools that have historically struggled to meet benchmarks for key educational attainment such as kindergarten readiness.

These neighborhoods also have census tracts with a higher percentage of minorities than other parts of the community. However, it is the empirical data with poverty indicators that the County utilizes for addressing poverty and inequities rather than the racial composition of the neighborhoods. This ensures County programs, services, and investments are consistent with state and federal restrictions on race-related programming presented further in the item.

*Establish a Community Restoration Fund dedicated to investing exclusively in areas identified in the audit. Investment would include infrastructure, housing stabilization, environmental remediation, neighborhood revitalization, community wealth-building & economic mobility programs, and community healing.*

As described through the item and Attachment #2, the County continues to make significant investment in addressing poverty and inequities in the community. Since 2021, the County has invested more than \$34 million to improve the lives of residents in neighborhoods such as Bond, Frenchtown, Griffin Heights, and South City through human services programs, healthcare, housing, and economic development. At the same time, another \$319 million has been dedicated through Blueprint for infrastructure investments in high poverty neighborhoods.

Additionally, through an interlocal agreement with the City, the Frenchtown/Southside Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) was established to revitalize the neighborhoods within its boundaries which include Frenchtown and South City. Through the partnership with the City, the County dedicates approximately \$4.2 million in annual property tax revenues to the CRA to make critical investments in the neighborhoods in the areas of affordable housing, economic development, and neighborhood revitalization.

*Ensure County budgets, planning documents, and capital projects include a clear framework for reducing disparities identified in the audits.*

The County's commitment to addressing poverty and inequities is well documented and reflected in its annual investment, policies, and plans adopted by the Board. In addition to the more than \$34 million invested since 2021 in human services programs as well as \$319 million dedicated through Blueprint for infrastructure investments in high poverty neighborhoods, the County's annual budget includes:

- \$7.7 million annually in healthcare for uninsured and underinsured low-income residents.
- \$4.2 million annually to the Frenchtown/Southside CRA to invest and revitalize neighborhoods including Frenchtown and South City.
- \$1.3 million annually in CHSP for human services for which 75% of funding serves residents in high poverty neighborhoods.

- \$1.5 million annually to increase and preserve the stock of affordable housing for low-income households.

Additionally, through the Tallahassee-Leon County Comprehensive Plan, the County and City have adopted policies and made capital investments to spur long-term economic growth in high poverty neighborhoods. Incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan is the Southside Action Plan (SAP) which is a robust three-phased approach to creating balanced and equitable growth in those areas designated within the SAP boundary of southern Leon County. The boundary includes Bond, Frenchtown, Griffin Heights, Providence, and South City neighborhoods. The primary goal of the policy is to encourage quality land development and redevelopment within the area to support equitable population growth, establish an environment that incentivizes retention and expansion of business and employment opportunities, and to attain an income mix comparable to the remainder of the urbanized County.

Over the past five years, more than \$1.13 billion in public and private investments have been made within the SAP area, which includes an increase in available affordable housing; expansion of businesses and employment centers; and infrastructure improvements. The infrastructure improvements have included road resurfacing, new sidewalks, and access to sewer service. These improvements have been critical to attracting greater private investment to enhance the quality of life and economic opportunities for residents within the SAP area.

*Prioritize access to County-owned lands for historically burdened communities for agriculture, housing, cooperatives, and restorative development.*

As shared earlier, in 2019, the County, in partnership with the City, established the Tallahassee-Leon County Community Land Trust (CLT) to construct new homes for low-income households that will remain affordable in perpetuity. As part of the partnership, the County donates properties deemed suitable for affordable housing to the CLT to construct new homes. The homes are sold to low-income households that have the credit and financial history, but not the capital. The CLT has completed eight homes thus far on County donated land, including four homes in the Griffin Heights neighborhood.

In addition to affordable housing, the County's Sustainability Office operates the Leon County Community Garden Program to provide technical assistance, materials, and grants to support residents in establishing or revitalizing community gardens throughout the County. Eligible locations for grants include vacant County-owned land, school campuses, and other community spaces. Grants of up to \$1,000 are available to support garden development and sustainability efforts. Within the past two years, the Community Garden Program has supported the establishment of eight community gardens in neighborhoods such as South City, Frenchtown, and Griffin Heights.

Although the CLT and Community Garden Program have targeted and benefited households and neighborhoods that have historically experienced poverty and inequities, the County does not prioritize programs and services based on race and/or ethnicity. As mentioned throughout the item, the County utilizes empirical data to identify households and neighborhoods most impacted

by poverty, and subsequently develops and implements programs and services to improve their quality of life and enhance their economic security.

#### Federal and State Efforts to Prohibit Policies and Investment Based on Historic Discrimination

The primary goal of the proposed charter amendment is to provide exclusive resources and services to neighborhoods that experienced past and historic racial discrimination in the community (i.e., slavery, Jim Crow, etc.). However, recent and ongoing state and federal efforts have sought to prohibit the adoption and implementation of policies, programs, and services that seek to address historic racial disenfranchisement or DEI. The definition of DEI in Presidential Executive Orders and legislation have generally included employment, policies, programs, and services that “promote or provide preferential treatment or special benefits to a person or group based on race, color, sex, ethnicity, gender identity, or sexual orientation.”

At the state level, Florida passed the Individual Freedom Act in 2022 to restrict training related to systemic racism and identity in schools and workplaces. In addition, several bills have been filed for the 2026 Legislative session that would prohibit local governments from adopting or funding DEI-related policies and programs. The proposed legislation also seeks to void any current DEI policies and programs that are currently in place, remove elected officials from office that violate the prohibition, and authorize residents to sue local governments that adopt, implement and/or fund DEI-related policies and programs.

At the federal level, Executive Order 14173 issued on January 21, 2025, rescinded long-standing federal contractor requirements related to race and gender-based employment and contracting practices. Additionally, several federal departments have begun including language in grant contracts that require recipients to certify that they do not “operate any programs that advance or promote DEI, DEIA (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility), or discriminatory equity ideology”. As a result, many Florida local governments have already eliminated or suspended their minority- and women-owned business programs so not to jeopardize millions of dollars in federal grant funds. In December 2025, the County was awarded a \$16.8 million grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation (US DOT) for safety improvements on North Monroe Street. The County is currently coordinating with US DOT on the development of a contract agreement which may impose similar provisions that prohibit DEI-related policies, programs, and services. Therefore, the adoption of the proposed charter amendment is not recommended as it could immediately jeopardize federal funding recently awarded to the County.

#### Alternative Option for the Charter Review Committee

The County has been successful in addressing poverty and inequities in accordance with state and federal laws and without specific programs or provisions in the County Charter. Further, the adoption of the proposed charter amendment is not recommended as it could immediately jeopardize federal funding recently awarded to the County. Alternatively, the Committee may wish to provide a policy recommendation to the Board encouraging the continuation of the County’s long-standing commitment to reducing poverty in the community. The recommendation would be brought back to the Committee for final approval to be included as part of the Committee’s report to the Board.

**Options:**

1. Accept the report on Leon County's commitment and ongoing efforts to tackle poverty and historic inequities in the community.
2. Direct staff to prepare a policy recommendation to the Board encouraging the continuation of the County's long-standing commitment to reducing poverty in the community.
3. Committee direction.

**Recommendation:**

Option #1

**Attachments:**

1. Harmful Public Policy and Charter Reform Handout provided by Dr. Bruce Strouble, December 4, 2025
2. September 15, 2025 Status Report on Efforts to Address Poverty and Inequities in 32304
3. Rental Development Projects Funded by Leon County
4. Leon County Financial Empowerment Blueprint
5. Leon County Resolution 24-11

## **Policy Brief: Proposal to amend the Leon County Charter with an Article that Addresses Impacts of Harmful Public Policy**

**Prepared for:** Leon County Charter Review Committee

**Prepared by:** Dr. Bruce Strouble

**Date:** November 2025

**Attachments:** [\\*\\*ARTICLE X - Draft](#) [Article 10: FAQ](#)

### **Executive Summary**

Leon County faces persistent and well-documented disparities in wealth, health, housing, environmental exposure, and neighborhood opportunity. These inequities align closely with historic patterns of slavery, segregation, discriminatory housing policy, and public disinvestment—policies that were enacted or enforced by Leon County's government institutions across generations.

In February 2024, the Board of County Commissioners formally acknowledged and apologized for the County's role in these systems of harm. The proposed Charter Amendment provides the structural mechanism to act on that commitment by ensuring that acknowledged harms are matched with concrete, long-term restoration efforts.

This policy brief recommends creating a new Article in the Leon County Charter—Restoring Communities Impacted by Harmful Public Policy—to provide the structural authority, continuity, and long-term mandate necessary to address these historical harms and restore communities still impacted today.

A Charter-level provision is essential because the harm is structural, ongoing, and rooted in public policy; therefore, the remedy must be structural, ongoing, and institutional.

## Problem Statement

Leon County continues to exhibit some of Florida's starker geographic disparities. These disparities, from poverty rates and homeownership gaps to health outcomes and food insecurity, map directly onto historically Black neighborhoods targeted by slavery, Jim Crow segregation, redlining, urban renewal, and environmentally hazardous planning decisions.

## Key Facts

By 1860, **73–74%** of Leon County residents were enslaved—one of the highest ratios in the Deep South.<sup>1</sup>

Leon County was Florida's **leading cotton-producing** county; enslaved Black people represented the county's primary economic asset.<sup>2</sup>

After Emancipation, Black residents were pushed into **sharecropping, debt peonage, and convict leasing**, with the Leon County sheriff leasing prisoners to private companies until 1923.<sup>3</sup>

Jim Crow segregation shaped hospitals, schools, transportation, and housing. Tallahassee Memorial Hospital did not treat Black patients until the late 1960s.

Urban renewal demolished **244 structures** in the Smokey Hollow neighborhood, displacing **1,200+ Black residents**.

Environmental burdens, including brownfields, contaminated industrial sites, and hazardous corridors, are disproportionately located in Black communities, including Tallahassee's Southside .

Today's inequities (poverty, disease, food insecurity, eviction rates, life expectancy gaps) map directly onto these same neighborhoods. These outcomes cannot be explained by contemporary policy alone; they are the predictable continuation of historical public decisions.

## Analysis: Why the Charter Must Address Historic Impacts

**1. Historic harms were created through “county policy”.**

Laws, zoning, lending restrictions, policing, and infrastructure choices produced patterns that continue today. The County cannot fully address inequity without addressing its policy roots.

**2. The consequences are multi-generational and ongoing.**

The same neighborhoods harmed by historical policies remain the most disadvantaged in terms of mobility, health, and economic opportunity.

**3. Programs alone cannot correct structural inequity.**

Programs are temporary—grant cycles end. Priorities shift with elections. A Charter Article ensures consistent, long-term responsibility.

**4. Equal protection requires mitigation—not neutrality.**

Courts, planners, and public administrators increasingly affirm that treating unequal conditions equally reinforces inequity.

Structural harm requires structural mitigation.

**5. Community restoration strengthens the whole county.**

Investing in historically harmed communities improves:

- workforce readiness
- public health
- climate resilience
- economic development
- neighborhood stability

Leon County cannot meet its long-term goals while key communities remain structurally burdened.

## Comparative Case Studies: Local Governments Leading Restoration

### U.S. Examples

- **Evanston, IL** – Housing restoration fund based on documented historic exclusion in zoning and lending. <https://www.cityofevanston.org/government/city-council/reparations>
- **Asheville, NC** – Reparative equity policy addressing government-produced harms in housing, policing, and economic systems.  
<https://www.ashevillenc.gov/department/city-clerk/boards-and-commissions/reparations-commission/>
- **Alameda County, CA** – County-level Historic Harms Task Force guiding long-term public investment  
[https://www.acgov.org/board/bos\\_calendar/documents/DocsAgendaReg\\_6\\_11\\_2\\_5/GENERAL%20ADMINISTRATION/Regular%20Calendar/DRAFT\\_Guidelines\\_HarmReport.pdf](https://www.acgov.org/board/bos_calendar/documents/DocsAgendaReg_6_11_2_5/GENERAL%20ADMINISTRATION/Regular%20Calendar/DRAFT_Guidelines_HarmReport.pdf)
- **San Francisco, CA** – Mandatory historical harm audits used in budgeting and planning. <https://www.sf.gov/sites/default/files/2023-07/AARAC%20Reparations%20Final%20Report%20July%207%2C%202023.pdf>
- **Detroit, MI** – Black Community Wealth Fund is tied to displacement and redlining. <https://www.bridgedetroit.com/opinion-public-policy-protected-white-ownership-gutted-black-wealth/>

### International Examples

- **Toronto, ON** – Charter-level equity-based planning for disinvested neighborhoods. <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/accountability-operations-customer-service/long-term-vision-plans-and-strategies/toronto-strong-neighbourhoods-strategy/>
- **Belo Horizonte, Brazil** – Community restoration model with long-term commitments to low-income zones. <https://www.futurepolicy.org/food-and-water/belo-horizonte-food-security-policy/>
- **Cape Town, South Africa** – Land restoration to remedy apartheid-era displacement.  
[https://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/UNSWLawJ/1999/45.html?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/UNSWLawJ/1999/45.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

Leon County would be *well aligned* with emerging national and global best practices.

**Policy Recommendation:** Add a New Article to the Charter

**Proposed Title:** Article X – Restoring Communities Impacted by Harmful Public Policy

**Core Functions of the Article**

**1. Acknowledge the impacts of historic harmful policy**

Recognizes that past county, city, and state policies created generational disadvantage in specific communities.

**2. Mandate periodic Historical Disparity Audits**

To identify geographic areas where historic public policy harms continue to produce inequity.

**3. Establish a Community Restoration Fund**

Supports investments in:

- infrastructure
- housing stabilization
- environmental remediation
- neighborhood revitalization
- community wealth-building & economic mobility programs
- Community Healing

*All targeted to areas identified by the audits.*

**4. Create authority for Priority Land-Leasing**

Allows historically burdened communities priority access to county-owned land for agriculture, housing, cooperatives, and restorative development.

## **5. Require Restorative Investment Strategies**

Ensures that county budgets, planning documents, and capital projects include a clear framework for reducing disparities identified in the audits.

### **Expected Benefits**

#### **For impacted neighborhoods:**

- Improved housing stability
- Increased homeownership and land access
- Better health outcomes
- Cleaner environments and reduced risk
- Greater access to food and transportation
- Increased economic mobility
- Enhanced climate resiliency

#### **For the entire county:**

- Reduced costs of social services
- More equitable economic development
- Healthier workforce
- Reduced crime and violence
- Improved intergenerational outcomes
- Stronger civic trust and social cohesion

Community restoration is not only just—it is economically efficient.

## Conclusion

The evidence is overwhelming:

### **Historic public policies created the inequities we now face.**

A Charter Article on Historic Impact Mitigation & Community Restoration provides the structural authority, constitutional continuity, and policy stability necessary to repair these harms and build a more resilient, prosperous Leon County.

This amendment is a commitment to fairness, equal opportunity, and the long-term health of the entire community.

Leon County cannot move forward without addressing the legacy it inherited—and this Charter Review cycle is the moment to do so.

## **References (Academic & Archival)**

1. U.S. Census Bureau, *Population of the United States: 1860*; Shofner, J. (1977). “Slavery in Florida.” *Florida Historical Quarterly*.
2. Paisley, C. (1989). *The Red Hills of Florida*. University of Alabama Press; Walkup, F., *Florida Historical Quarterly*.
3. Ouzts, C. *FHQ*; Shofner, J. *FHQ*; Harris, C. “Abolition of Convict Leasing in Florida,” *Journal of Southern History*.
4. Jones, P. (2004). *The Selma of the South*; Florida DHR, FAMU Hospital Survey.
5. Landers, J. *The Smokey Hollow Story*; FSU Urban & Regional Planning Archives.
6. Gragg, R. “Environmental Justice in Florida,” *Human Ecology Review*; EPA Brownfield Records.
7. U.S. Census ACS; USDA Food Access Atlas; Leon County Community Health Assessment; Chetty et al., Opportunity Atlas.

# Leon County Board of County Commissioners

## Agenda Item #20

September 15, 2025

**To:** Honorable Chairman and Members of the Board

**From:** Vincent S. Long, County Administrator

**Title:** Status Report on Efforts to Address Poverty and Inequities in 32304

<b>Review and Approval:</b>	Vincent S. Long, County Administrator
<b>Department / Division Review:</b>	Ken Morris, Assistant County Administrator Shington Lamy, Assistant County Administrator Nawfal Ezzagaghi, Assistant County Administrator Artie White, Director, Planning, Land Management & Community Enhancement (PLACE)
<b>Lead Staff / Project Team:</b>	Abigail Thomas, Director, Office of Human Services and Community Partnerships Marcus West, Neighborhood Engagement and Community Partnerships Manager Autumn Calder, Director, Blueprint Intergovernmental Agency

### **Statement of Issue:**

As requested by the Board, this item provides a status report on the County's ongoing partnerships, programs, and investments to address poverty and inequity in neighborhoods within the 32304 zip code area. The item also includes comparative data on local government investments in other zip codes in Leon County to address poverty and inequities as requested by the Board.

### **Fiscal Impact:**

This item has no fiscal impact.

### **Staff Recommendations:**

Option #1: Accept the status report on Leon County's efforts to address poverty and inequities in 32304.

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## Report and Discussion

### **Background:**

As requested by the Board on April 8, 2025, this item provides a status report on the County's partnerships, programs, and investments to address poverty and inequity in neighborhoods within the 32304 zip code area. The item also includes comparative data on local government investments in other zip codes in Leon County to address poverty and inequities as requested by the Board.

This status report advances the following FY 2022 – FY 2026 Strategic Initiatives:

- *Work with the City of Tallahassee on the development and implementation of the Neighborhood First Program to engage residents and develop plans to address poverty and inequity in targeted neighborhoods including 32304. (2022-33)*
- *Partner with the City of Tallahassee, Capital City Chamber of Commerce, and local stakeholders to spur economic growth and financial security in the neighborhoods that have historically experienced poverty and racial inequity through initiatives such as Bank On Tallahassee. (2023-46)*

These particular Strategic Initiatives align with the Board's Economy and Quality of Life Strategic Priorities:

- *(EC2) Support programs, policies and initiatives to attract, create, and promote expansion of business, entrepreneurship, job creation, workforce development, economic equity, and mobility.*
- *(Q2) Provide relevant and essential offerings through our libraries and community centers which promote literacy, life-long learning, and social equity.*
- *(Q4) Support and promote access to basic healthcare, mental health, affordable housing, and homeless prevention services to our community members most in need.*
- *(Q5) Promote livability, health and sense of community by supporting strong neighborhoods, enhancing mobility, encouraging human scale development, and creating public spaces for people of all ages.*

Leon County has a long history of tackling poverty through programs, policies, and partnerships throughout the County with an emphasis on 32304. For nearly 30 years, the County has funded human programs through the Community Human Services Partnership (CHSP) which are delivering essential resources such as food, childcare, and shelter to low-income families. Additionally, for more than 20 years, the County has provided uninsured and underinsured low-income individuals access to high quality comprehensive health and medical services in partnership with local healthcare providers. Furthermore, over the past ten years the County has expanded its investment in housing to increase and preserve the stock of affordable housing for low-income households.

In recent years, the County has increased its investments, expanded its partnerships, and enhanced its programs to reduce poverty in 32304 and other neighborhoods. On November 19, 2021, the Board was provided a comprehensive report on programs, services, initiatives, and events adopted and implemented by the County and its community partners to address poverty and inequities in

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communities and neighborhoods within the 32304 zip code. At that time, the Board approved recommendations focused on strengthening the County's collaboration with the City of Tallahassee (City) to develop and implement the City's Neighborhood First Program which aims to reduce crime, enhance quality of life, and increase economic prosperity in 32304 which includes Frenchtown and Griffin Heights, and other high poverty neighborhoods in the community such as Bond (32310), Providence (32310), and South City (32301).

Since 2021, the County has strengthened its efforts to address poverty through the investment of more than \$34 million to improve the lives of residents in neighborhoods that have historically experienced poverty and inequities through human services, healthcare, housing, and economic development. At the same time, the County has dedicated \$319 million through Blueprint for current and planned infrastructure investments in 32304 and high poverty neighborhoods in other zip codes (32301, 32303 and 32305). The following Analysis section details the County's ongoing efforts through active engagement, significant investment, and critical programming in partnership with local stakeholders. Subsequently, a comparison of local investments to address poverty in 32304 and other zip codes in the community is provided.

### **Analysis:**

According to the U.S. Census (American Community Survey Data 2019–2023), zip code 32304 has the highest poverty rate in the community at 49.4%, compared with the 18.1% countywide average. Also, 32304 has the lowest homeownership rate (13% compared to 52% countywide) and a median household income of \$30,823 (compared to \$66,000 countywide). Poverty in 32304 is concentrated in census tracts that include the Frenchtown and Griffin Heights neighborhoods within the city limits. As a result, the County has collaborated with the City and other local partners to develop, fund, and support a variety of programs, services, events, and initiatives to address poverty and inequity in 32304. The following sections detail the County's efforts in the areas of community partnerships and neighborhood engagement, human services, health care, housing, and economic development to improve the quality of life and spur economic growth in 32304.

### **Community Partnerships and Neighborhood Engagements**

Collaboration and coordination with community partners and stakeholders to engage high poverty neighborhoods has been a critical component to the County's effort to connect and deliver to residents essential programs and services in the community. Over the past several years, the County's partnerships to engage 32304 residents have included:

- Implementation of the City's Neighborhood First Plans for Bond, Frenchtown, and Griffin Heights (Attachments #1, #2, and #3), developed by the residents to identify tangible actions to reduce crime, enhance quality of life, and increase economic prosperity in those neighborhoods. Since 2022, the County has invested more than \$3 million to implement the Neighborhood First Plans by aligning and enhancing existing programs for human services and housing which are further detailed in the item.
- Collaboration with the City and Children Services Council of Leon County (CSC Leon) in 2022 to conduct a series of nine meetings in neighborhoods with the highest food insecurity rates that engaged more than 300 residents to discuss and identify the root causes. The

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overwhelming response of participants was the need for greater awareness of available resources in the community to address food insecurity and poverty and led to:

- The creation of the Neighborhood Engagement and Community Partnership Manager position by the Board to actively engage and connect residents to agencies, programs, and services focused on improving quality of life and economic prosperity for individuals and families; and
- The establishment of the Trusted People Neighborhood Steering Committee (Trusted People) in partnership with the City, CSC Leon, and the United Way of the Big Bend (UWBB) to promote available resources in neighborhoods that have historically experienced inequity and disinvestment to address issues of poverty and food insecurity. The Trusted People Committee is comprised of neighborhood leaders and stakeholders from Bond, Frenchtown, Griffin Heights, Providence, South City, and Woodville neighborhoods appointed by the County, City, CSC Leon, and UWBB.
- Hosting workshops, seminars, and expos on heirs' property, healthy cooking, and youth employment with the City, CSC Leon, and human service providers in high poverty neighborhoods including 32304 that have engaged over 500 residents.

Building on the collaborative effort to engage and connect residents of 32304 and other low-income neighborhoods to available resources, the County, City, CSC Leon, UWBB, and United Partners in Human Services (UPHS) will host a Trunk or Treat event October 25, 2025 at the Old West Enrichment Center. During the event human service agencies funded by the County, City, CSC Leon, and UWBB will distribute candy and information on programs and services, including food, housing, childcare, healthcare, and more to youth and families. As presented in the following section, the event strengthens the County's engagement efforts through partnerships as well as highlights the County's investment in human services to enhance the quality of life and address poverty.

### Expansion of Human Services Programs

According to the Urban Institute, investing in human services is critical to improving quality of life and addressing poverty. Therefore, Leon County has been steadfast in its commitment and investment in human service programs that improve the quality of life of our residents. Over the past several years, the County has strengthened efforts in neighborhoods that have historically experienced poverty including in 32304 by expanding access to human services through the following:

- In 2019, the County in partnership with City established the Community Human Services Partnership (CHSP) Promise Zone Category which invests \$1.1 million each funding cycle to provide direct services such as food, legal aid, after school care, and healthcare to high poverty neighborhoods. For more than 30 years, the County and City have planned, coordinated, and invested in human services through CHSP, which utilizes a competitive grant process to fund essential human services programs delivered by local not-for-profit organizations.

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- In 2022, the County in partnership with the Leon County Sheriff's Office (LCSO), City, and Leon County Schools established the Council of the Status of Men and Boys (CSMB) through LCSO to address crime within 32304 and the broader community impacting young Black males between the ages of 15 and 24. In 32304, CSMB initiative includes community-based violence intervention programs at Springfield Apartments in Griffin Heights, and credible messengers and street-level navigators who engage directly with high-risk youth at schools such as Griffin Middle School and Godby High School.
- Over the past several years, the County and City have partnered with Second Harvest of the Big Bend (Second Harvest) to install four temperature-controlled 24/7 food lockers at Good News Outreach in Frenchtown, Neighborhood Medical Center on South Monroe, Hartsfield Elementary School, and Sabal Palm Elementary School. The lockers have distributed over 17,000 meals to more than 3,200 residents.
- In 2022, the County, in partnership with CSC Leon and UWBB, launched the Taste Bud Explorers nutrition series to promote healthy cooking and meal planning, which reached over 150 residents in Bond, Frenchtown, Griffin Heights, and Providence neighborhoods.
- In 2023, the County entered into a memorandum of understanding with Second Harvest to hold Summer BreakSpots which provides kids with free meals and snacks at the Main Library, Dr. BL Perry, Jr. Branch, Jane G. Sauls Fort Braden Branch, and the Woodville Branch during the summer. From June 2nd to August 1st, 4,255 meals were distributed to kids at the locations which is the most since the program began.
- In 2022, the County provided \$60,000 to Second Harvest to purchase a truck for their Mobile Pop-Up Pantry program. The mobile markets provide families with fresh produce, protein and nonperishable food items. Second Harvest also hosts Neighborhood Empowerment events, which in addition to fresh produce and nonperishable food items and also feature local human service providers that offer an array of services, including employment assistance, healthcare, legal support, SNAP benefits enrollment, and other essential resources. Mobile market events are held several times a month and Neighborhood Empowerment events are held monthly throughout the community. These events occur in neighborhoods experiencing elevated food insecurity, including the Lincoln Center in Frenchtown, Woodville Branch Library, Springfield Apartments in Griffin Heights, and Greater Love Church in South City.
- In 2024, the County and City collaborated with CSC Leon to establish line-item funding for emergency homeless shelters in the annual amount of \$1.5 million. The largest emergency homeless shelters including Kearney Center, HOPE Community, and Capital City Youth Services are located in 32304 and shelters offer individuals, families, or youth experiencing homelessness temporary housing, food, showers, and case management 24 hours a day, seven (7) days a week.
- In 2024, the County expanded its partnership with 2-1-1 Big Bend to provide annual direct funding in the amount of \$112,500 for the 24-hour Helpline and the Lyft transportation program to address the need for greater knowledge of available resources and transportation. According to 2-1-1, nearly 4,000 Lyft rides have been coordinated in FY 2025 so far. Residents of 32304 accounted for nearly 830 Lyft rides (22%), the second

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highest of any zip code behind 32301. Further, 32304 continues to represent the largest share (31%) of 2-1-1 Helpline call volume.

- In 2021, the Board created the Community Resource Specialist as part of the County's Essential Libraries Initiative to connect Library patrons with a variety of human service agency resources. The Community Resource Specialist is a professional social worker who has provided over 1,750 one-on-one sessions, helping residents access jobs, SNAP, Medicaid, and other services.
- The County invests \$100,000 annually in the Direct Emergency Assistance Program (DEAP) to assist residents with past due rent, mortgage and/or utilities. Last year, 35% of households that received DEAP funding lived in 32304.

### Healthcare Programs

Residents of 32304 are less likely to have health insurance. According to U.S. Census data, 12.9% of 32304 residents are uninsured compared to the Countywide rate of 7.7%. Uninsured individuals are more likely to delay care, forgo prescriptions, and rely on emergency medical services for routine medical needs, which can lead to worsened health outcomes and increased costs to the public health system. Acknowledging the chronic health disparities in 32304, for over two decades the County has led the effort to ensure residents have access to high quality health care through the following:

- The County invests over \$1.75 million annually through the Healthcare Services Program (i.e. CareNet) to provide primary, dental, and mental services, assistance with prescription medications, and specialty care to uninsured residents. The County partners with Apalachee Center, Bond Community Health Center (Bond), Neighborhood Medical Center (NMC), FAMU Pharmacy, and WeCare. As reported by the healthcare partners, 32304 residents represent the highest percentage of patients served (30%) in the community.
- The County partners with Bond and NMC to provide primary care, dental care, and health screenings through the mobile health units. Bond and NMC partner with local organizations to expand health care services through mobile units at community events, including the Woodville Founder's Day and the Woodville Community Meeting. Additionally, the mobile units regularly visit neighborhoods, including the Pensacola Street Corridor, Springfield Apartments in Griffin Heights, and Walker Ford Community Center in the Bond Community. Mobile units provide health care services two to three times per week, and at least two Saturdays a month throughout Leon County.
- The County partners with Big Bend Area Health Education Center (Big Bend AHEC) annually to provide healthcare navigation services at the County Main Library and several branch libraries including the Dr. BL Perry, Jr. Branch, Woodville Branch, and Jane G. Sauls Fort Braden Branch. Big Bend AHEC has connected more than 50 people with health insurance through the federal health insurance marketplace.

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### Investment in Safe and Affordable Housing

Access to safe and affordable housing is another critical tool in addressing poverty and inequity. In 32304, the homeownership rate of 13% is significantly lower than the Countywide average of 52%. Homeownership is the primary vehicle for wealth creation and promotes neighborhood stability and therefore the County has taken the following actions:

- In 2019, the County, in partnership with the City, established the Tallahassee-Leon County Community Land Trust (CLT) through the Tallahassee Lenders' Consortium to construct new homes for low-income households that will remain affordable in perpetuity. As part of the partnership, the County donates properties deemed suitable for affordable housing to the CLT to construct new homes. The CLT has completed eight homes thus far on County donated land, including four homes in Griffin Heights.
- In 2022, the County entered into an interlocal agreement with the City to utilize County State Housing Initiative Partnership (SHIP) funds to invest in the construction of new homes in Neighborhood First Program neighborhoods. As a result, the County has invested more than \$900,000 for the construction of 13 homes with County SHIP funds in Neighborhood First communities, including six (6) recently completed homes in the Providence and Griffin Heights neighborhoods.
- In 2023, the County partnered with Legal Services of North Florida (LSNF) to host Heir Property Workshops in Bond, Frenchtown, Providence, and Woodville which were attended by more than 150 residents to raise awareness of the importance of clear title of homeownership for securing private financing as well as local, state and federal assistance.
- In 2025, the County received a \$750,000 Small Cities Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) that will be utilized to rehabilitate homes of low-income households in Leon County over the next three years.
- In 2025, the County contracted with LSNF in the amount of \$50,000 annually to provide legal assistance to help low-income families clear title and resolve heirs' property issues, which is anticipated to serve 20 families annually including households in 32304.

Additionally, and as reported in previous agenda items, the highest affordable housing need in the community is affordable rental units for very low-income households. As a result, the County has invested a majority of its affordable housing funds for rental development over the previous five years within 32304 and other zip codes with high poverty rates. Such investments include:

- Providing \$5.8 million in direct funding and more than \$183 million in bonding for affordable housing rental projects in high poverty communities that have or will build more than 1,200 units within the next 12 to 18 months.
- Providing \$175,000 to the Tallahassee Housing Authority to develop a master plan for the Springfield Apartments in Griffin Heights.
- Committing to invest a total of \$500,000 annually in affordable rental development for very-low and extremely-low income households which includes residents in 32304 through the combination of SHIP, general revenue, and the County's portion of the newly established affordable housing program in the Office of Economic Vitality (OEV).

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### Financial Empowerment and Economic Development

Unemployment in 32304 is considerably higher (nearly 8%) than the Countywide average (4.4%). In addition, businesses in 32304 and other neighborhoods with historic disinvestment report a lack of access to capital due to limited banking institutions in their communities. As a result, the County has taken considerable action to address the disparities, including the following:

- Partnering with FAMU Federal Credit Union in 2021 to establish the SmartSteps Microloan Program to support the growth and sustainability of Black, minority, and women-owned small businesses. The Program provides financial capital to historically marginalized entrepreneurs to build their businesses. The County allocated \$2.5 million to establish the program, with FAMU Federal Credit Union contributing a \$250,000 match. The City provided an additional \$500,000 in the microloan fund as part of the implementation of the Neighborhood First Plans. To date, SmartSteps has distributed over \$1 million in microloans to 51 Black, minority, and women-owned businesses. Approximately 36% of loans have gone to businesses located in 32304, more than any other zip code. As a revolving loan program, repaid funds are reinvested to support additional MWSBE businesses.
- Partnering with the City, CSC Leon, and CareerSource in Spring 2025 to hold Youth Employment Sessions in Bond, Frenchtown, Chaires/Capitola, and Woodville neighborhoods, connecting over 180 teens and young adults with job placement and apprenticeship opportunities.
- Hosting the annual Leon Works Expo to connect hundreds of local high school students interested in skilled careers with employers and academic partners.
- Hosting financial literacy and business and workforce development programs at the Main Library and all branch libraries. These programs include an ongoing partnership with Envision Credit Union to offer youth financial literacy courses that include budgeting, saving, and debt management. In addition, the Library partners with CareerSource Capital Region to provide four programs a year, including resume workshops and job application assistance, as well as Florida State University and Florida A&M University to conduct workshops on salary negotiation, LinkedIn best practices, multi-generational workplace success, and work-life balance. Since FY 2023, the library has hosted nearly 50 financial literacy and business and workforce development programs for 249 patrons.
- Ongoing partnership with Tallahassee State College (TSC) to support the emergency medical technician (EMT) program, including the dual enrollment program located on the campus of Godby High School which is the primary high school for 32304. This program provides students in 32304 with the skills and professional certification to work as an EMT upon graduation. Since the program launched in 2023, 23 students have completed the training with an additional 10 students currently enrolled for the 2025 school year. In addition, TSC recently hired a 32304 coordinator to help promote this program and other educational training programs and certifications offered by TSC to ensure that residents are aware of and have access to resources that can improve their financial opportunities.

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- Ongoing partnership with UWBB to offer the Reality Store, a financial education initiative at the Main Library. The reality store is an engaging opportunity for young adults to learn about personal accounting and financial responsibility. Since the program launched locally in 2015, more than 500 youth have participated.
- Partnering with the Capital City Chamber of Commerce (Capital City Chamber), in 2022, to support the Bank On Tallahassee Initiative which improves access to banks and credit units for low-income households and helps reduce barriers for households with previous credit issues. This partnership led to:
  - The County applying and securing \$75,000 from the Cities for Financial Empowerment (CFE) which is funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies to expand Bank On Tallahassee through Capital City Chamber.
  - Development of a CFE Financial Empowerment Blueprint approved by the Board (Attachment #4) that memorializes the County's ongoing efforts to spur economic growth in neighborhoods that have historically experienced poverty including 32304 through human services, healthcare, and initiatives such as Bank On Tallahassee.
  - The County applying for and securing a \$20,000 planning grant from CFE to work with the Capital City Chamber of Commerce to evaluate the establishment of a Financial Empowerment Center (FEC) in Leon County, with a focus on serving residents of 32304 and other high-poverty areas.

#### Investments in Other Areas of the Community to Address Poverty and Inequities

As requested by the Board, this section provides comparative information on local government investments in other zip codes in Leon County to address poverty and inequities. As mentioned earlier and reflected in Table #1, 32304 has the highest poverty rate in the community according to the U.S. Census. However, high poverty is not exclusive to 32304. Three other zip codes have poverty rates higher than the County average and include the neighborhoods and communities of Bond (32310), South City (32301), Providence (32310), and Woodville (32305).

*Table #1. Poverty Rates In Leon County by Zip Codes*

<b>Zip Code</b>	<b>Poverty Rate</b>
32304	49.4%
32310	28.9%
32301	23.7%
32305	21.8%
32303	17.3%
32308	9.3%
32311	7.6%
32312	5.4%
32309	4.3%
32317	2.7%
County Average	18.1%

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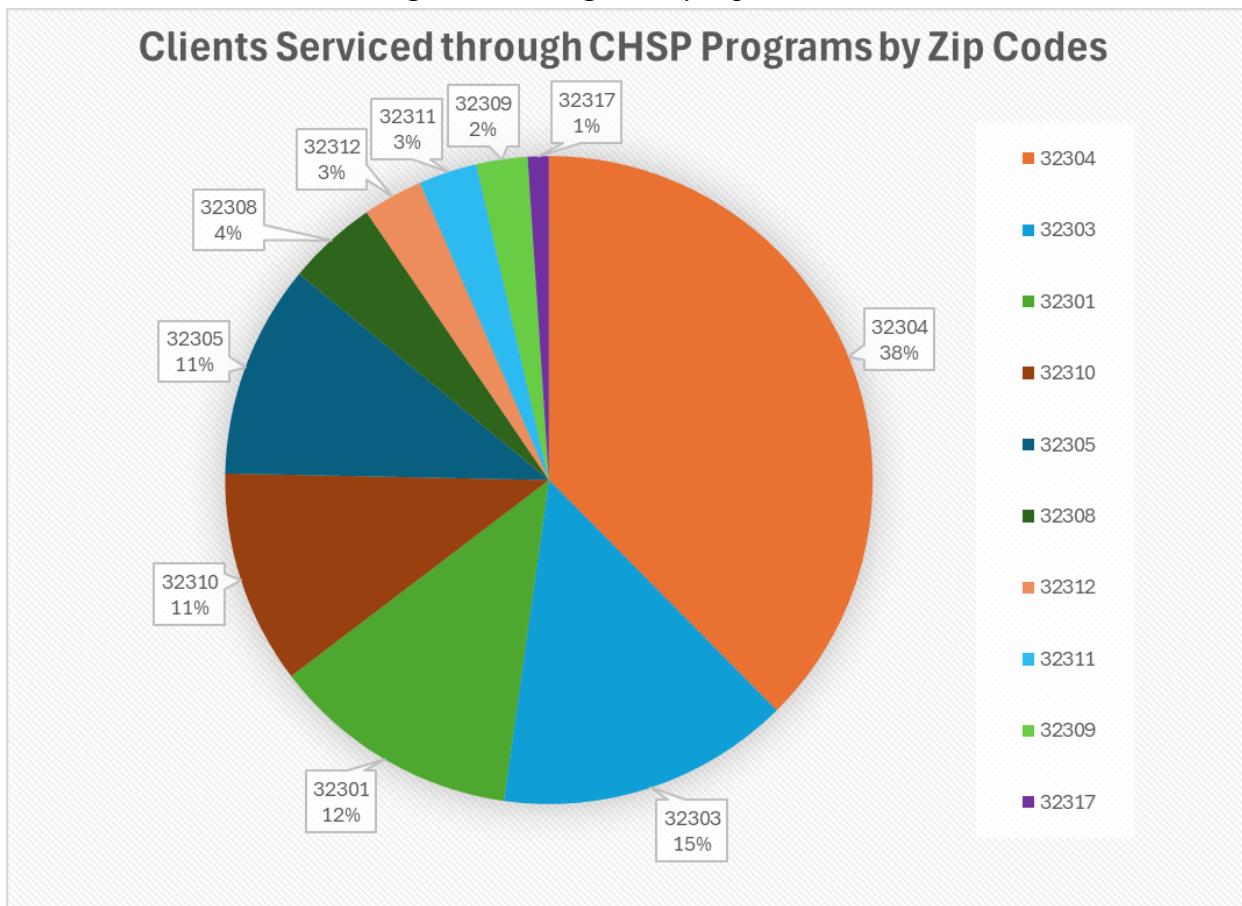
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Similar to Griffin Heights and Frenchtown in 32304, the neighborhoods and communities in these zip codes have median household incomes below the County average, a high percentage of residents without a high school diploma, and are zoned for schools that have historically struggled to meet benchmarks for key educational attainment, including kindergarten readiness and reading levels.

Therefore, local investment to address poverty has not been exclusive to the 32304 zip code. As presented throughout the item, considerable human service investments have been made in Bond (32310), Providence (32310), South City (32301), and Woodville (32305) to improve the socioeconomic outlook of the residents. Annually, the County and City invest approximately \$4 million in human service programs through CHSP. As shown in Chart #1, CHSP agencies report more than 75% of County and City funding serves residents in high-poverty neighborhoods located in 32304, 32310, 32301, 32303, and 32305.

*Chart #1. Clients Served through CHSP Programs by Zip Codes*



As mentioned earlier, the County has invested more than \$34 million in housing, human services, and healthcare over the last five years. Over \$29 million, or 85%, of those funds were invested in programs to serve residents of 32304, 32303, 32301, 32305, and 32310.

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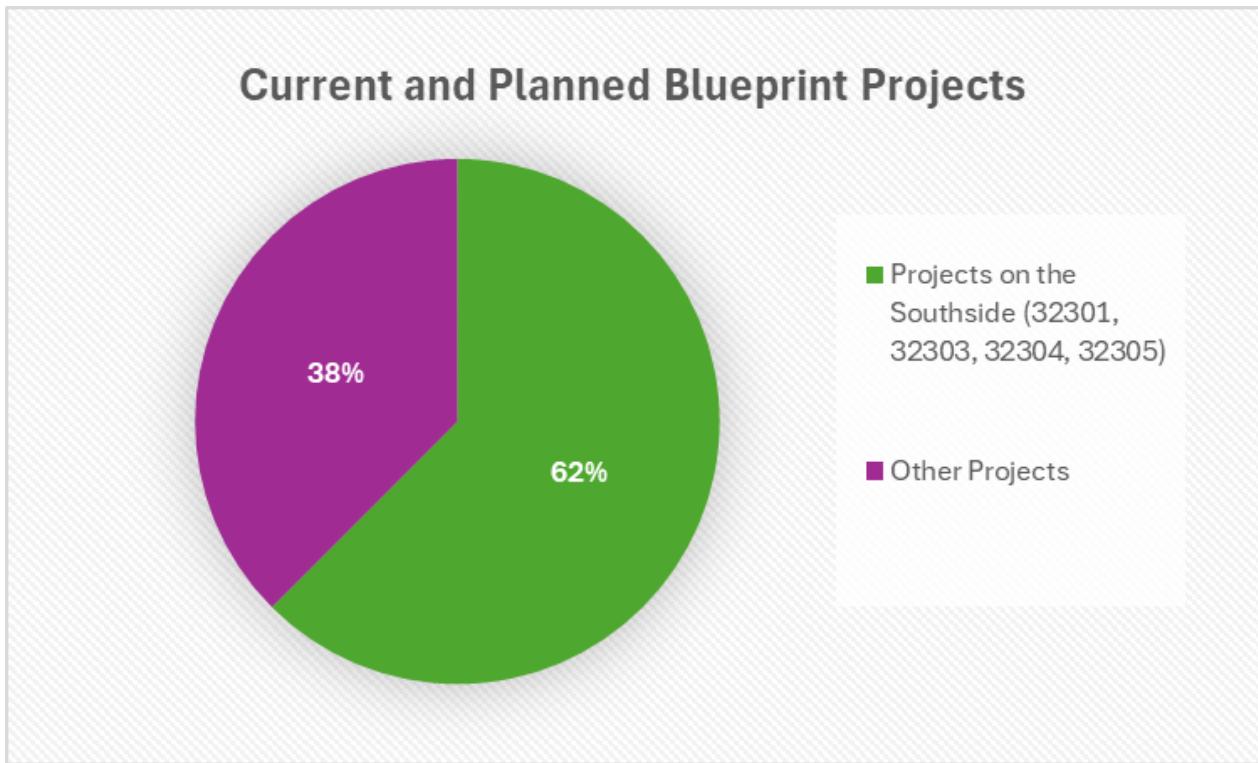
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Investment in infrastructure is also essential to the quality of life and economic prosperity in neighborhoods and communities that have historically experienced poverty and inequities. Therefore, the County and City have made significant infrastructure investments in the zip codes with high poverty rates, particularly through the joint Blueprint Intergovernmental Agency. In fact, 20 of 32 Blueprint projects (62%) planned or underway are located in 32301, 32303, 32304, and 32305, for a total investment of \$319 million.

*Chart #2: Current and Planned Blueprint Projects*



These projects, which are also part of the Southside Action Plan adopted by the Board, include:

- More than \$1.5 million in Blueprint and State funding for the ongoing development of the South City Transit Center and improvements in the South City neighborhood.
- Approximately \$9 million in Blueprint funding for the Orange-Meridian Placemaking project, which revitalizes this area through construction of a new neighborhood park and community gathering space in the South City neighborhood, East Drainage Ditch enhancements, and investment in the South City Transit Center.
- Planned construction of Segment 4 of the Capital Cascades Trail in the amount of \$20 million that provides stormwater quality improvements, multi-use trail construction, and community gathering spaces connecting the Bond, Callen, Liberty Park, Lee Manor, and Providence neighborhoods.
- Construction of the Magnolia Drive Trail, including underground electric utilities, by Leon County, Blueprint, and the City just north of the South City neighborhood from South Adams Street to Apalachee Parkway in the amount of \$23.6 million.

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The projects reflect the County and City's commitment to identify and engage historically impoverished neighborhoods and make critical investments that improve the quality of life and economic prosperity for the residents in 32304 and other zip codes with high poverty rates (Attachment #5).

In addition to the significant investments made by the County and City, CSC Leon also provides annual investment in 32304 and other zip codes with high poverty rates to improve the quality of life of children and families. CSC Leon was established in November 2020 as an independent special district to specifically invest in programs that strengthen families, improve child outcomes, and reduce inequities. Since its inception through FY 2024, CSC Leon has invested more than \$6 million or 68% of its program funding in 32301, 32303, 32304, 32305, and 32310. According to CSC Leon, over 106,000 children and families served by the family support, kindergarten readiness, and youth development programs reside in these communities.

Further, in March 2025, CSC Leon approved \$2.5 million to support 13 youth development programs, including seven programs that will operate year-round to provide after school activities and summer opportunities. Many of these programs are located in neighborhoods such as Frenchtown, Griffin Heights, and South City, which also receive significant investment from the County and City. Therefore, CSC Leon partners with the County and City to share information and work together on community engagement efforts to enhance residents' awareness of and access to resources in the community through the Trusted People Committee and events such as the Taste Bud Explorers and the upcoming Trunk or Treat in October presented earlier.

#### Conclusion:

The County remains committed to tackling poverty and inequity in 32304 and other neighborhoods that have historically experienced disinvestment. Since 2021, Leon County has invested more than \$34 million in human services, healthcare, housing, and financial empowerment programs. Over \$29 million or 84% of those funds were invested in programs to serve residents of 32304, 32303, 32301, 32305, and 32310. Additionally, considerable infrastructure investment has been made and are ongoing in 32304 and other zip codes with high poverty that are improving quality of life of the residents and neighborhoods. Approximately 62% of Blueprint projects planned or underway are located in these communities (32301, 32303, 32304, and 32305) for a total investment of \$319 million.

The County actively monitors and evaluates the programs and services focused on addressing poverty in the community. Through CHSP, human services agencies submit quarterly reports that include demographic (i.e., gender, race, etc.) and residency (i.e. zip code, census tract, etc.) on clients they serve. The healthcare providers submit to the County annual reports that are provided to the federal government (i.e., Uniform Data System reports) that provide aggregate data on patients that include demographics, services rendered, and zip code data. The County tracks the household size, income level, and location of housing clients assisted with its SHIP funding for down payment assistance, housing rehabilitation, homeownership development, and rental development which is subsequently reported annually to the State. Additionally, as part of the County's Strategic Plan, the progress of initiatives such as working with the City to implement the Neighborhood First Plans are tracked, documented, and reported annually to the Board.

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As the County continues to implement programs and strategies that focus on reducing poverty and improving the lives and communities of the residents in those neighborhoods, subsequent updates will be provided to the Board through associated agenda items such as CHSP, healthcare, and housing. Utilizing the data and reports collected, these updates will highlight the County's continual focus and commitment to address poverty and inequities in 32304, as well as other neighborhoods that have historically experienced disinvestment.

**Options:**

1. Accept the updated status report on the implementation of Board action taken on addressing poverty and inequities in 32304.
2. Do not accept the status report on the implementation of Board action taken on addressing poverty and inequities in 32304.
3. Board direction.

**Recommendation:**

Option #1

**Attachments:**

1. [Greater Bond Neighborhood First Plan](#)
2. [Frenchtown Neighborhood First Plan](#)
3. [Griffin Heights Neighborhood First Plan](#)
4. [Leon County's Financial Empowerment Blueprint](#)
5. Blueprint Projects in 32301, 32303, 32304, and 32305

## Rental Development Projects Funded by Leon County

Attachment #3  
Page 1 of 2

<b>Project</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b># of Units</b>
Orange Avenue Apartments Redevelopment Project	2710 Country Club	400
Ridge Road Rental Development	795 Ridge Road	250
Social 1600 (aka Acasa Bainbridge)	1600 Old Bainbridge Road	168
The Hub (aka Acasa Ocala)	1303 Ocala Road	168
Social Tallahassee (aka Acasa High Rd)	1327 High Road	134
Lake Bradford Apartments	1131 & 1139 Kissimmee St	156
Leon Arms	2502 Holton St	100
<b>Total Number of Units</b>		<b>1,376</b>

<b>Bond Financing</b>	<b>Millions</b>
Orange Ave	18
Ridge Rd	55
Tallahassee Housing Portfolio	75
Lake Bradford	35
Leon Arms	15
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>198</b>

<b>Direct Dollars</b>	
Orange Avenue Redevelopment	\$5,765,353

Name	Location	Built/Planned Units	Development Status	# of Units Dedicated to Low Income Households (All At or Below 80%)		Market Rate Units		Total Units
Acasa Social Tallahassee	1327 High Rd	134	Completed	100	75%	34	25%	<b>134</b>
Acasa Bainbridge	1600 Old Bainbridge Rd	168	Completed	126	75%	42	25%	<b>168</b>
Acasa Ocala	1303 Ocala Rd	168	Completed	126	75%	42	25%	<b>168</b>
Ridge Road PUD	795 Ridge Road, Tallahassee, FL	250	Completed	250	100%	0	0%	<b>250</b>
Columbia Gardens/Magnolia Family (Orange Avenue Apartments) Phases 1 and 2	2710 Country Club Drive, Tallahassee, FL 32301	290	Completed	258	89%	32	11%	<b>290</b>
Columbia Gardens/Magnolia Family (Orange Avenue Apartments) Phase III	2710 Country Club Drive, Tallahassee, FL 32301	110	Funding Pipeline	110	100%	0	0%	<b>110</b>
Lake Bradford Apartments	1135 Kissimmee St, Tallahassee, FL 32310	156	Construction	156	100%	0	0%	<b>156</b>
Leon Arms	2502 Holton Street, Tallahassee	100	Funding Pipeline	100	100%	0	0%	<b>100</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>1,376</b>		<b>1226</b>	<b>89%</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>1,376</b>

# LEON COUNTY'S FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT BLUEPRINT

*Fostering Access to Opportunity Through Partnerships*



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is a Financial Empowerment Blueprint that outlines the initiatives, goals, and strategies of Leon County Government (County) to enhance financial security and racial wealth equity within the community. The creation of the Blueprint was supported by the Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund (CFE Fund) through participation in the CityStart initiative. The priority areas were created through extensive community feedback, data analysis, and collaboration with local stakeholders to ensure the strategies reflect the needs and aspirations of residents while addressing systemic challenges.

The CFE Fund's CityStart initiative is a structured approach to helping local governments develop a municipal Financial Empowerment Blueprint, which outlines a strategic plan for financial empowerment programs and policies (e.g., financial counseling, consumer protection, access to banking, asset building, etc.) based on stakeholder and community engagement.

This wealth equity-focused iteration of CityStart addresses the financial stability needs of residents and the opportunities to meet those needs, prioritizing individual and structural efforts for Black residents that foster wealth accumulation and mitigate wealth extraction.

Bloomberg Philanthropies' Greenwood Initiative, whose mission is to accelerate the pace of wealth accumulation for Black individuals and families and address systemic underinvestment in Black communities in the U.S., is advising the CFE Fund and municipal partners on the design and execution of the CityStart program utilizing a racial wealth equity lens. The Blueprint supports and aligns with existing County efforts to strengthen financial empowerment strategies and enhance initiatives that address long-standing disparities.

## Background

In 2023, in partnership with the City of Tallahassee (City) and the Capital City Chamber of Commerce (Capital City Chamber), Leon County Government applied for and was awarded \$75,000 to participate in the CityStart initiative from the CFE Fund. This collaborative effort was part of the County's ongoing Strategic Initiatives to address poverty and inequity in targeted neighborhoods, including the 32304 area, through support of the City's Neighborhood First initiative. Participation in the CityStart initiative

supports the County's ongoing efforts to address racial wealth equity to help individuals and families weather financial emergencies, promote economic growth, and ensure a stable future for generations to come.

## Development of the Blueprint

A key outcome of the CityStart initiative is the creation of a Financial Empowerment Blueprint, which serves as the final deliverable. This Blueprint outlines the County's ongoing goals and strategies aimed at enhancing financial security and promoting racial wealth equity within the community. The Blueprint also identifies historic policies and practices that have led to current challenges in wealth accumulation, which is defined as the acquiring of money, properties, or other assets that increase a person's net worth over time.

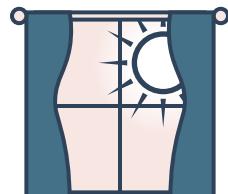


The Blueprint was developed after extensive stakeholder engagement at community meetings and through the evaluation of current strategic planning documents (Appendix 1). Multiple stakeholder roundtable meetings were held in the spring of 2023 and a Financial Empowerment Summit in September 2023 convened stakeholders from private, public, and nonprofit organizations to develop and refine priorities and strategies. In addition, the Blueprint prioritized and integrated financial empowerment strategies identified in Frenchtown, Griffin Heights, Greater Bond, and Providence neighborhoods through the City's Neighborhood First Program, a community-driven planning effort to address specific needs and priorities of historically disinvested neighborhoods, fostering collaboration between residents and local government to implement sustainable improvements. The County's Trusted People Neighborhood Engagement Steering Committee also provided input throughout the Blueprint development process.

- The information from the initial meetings, plan evaluations, and breakout sessions identified a recurring theme in local financial empowerment efforts:

### ***Enhancing awareness of and access to available resources.***

Leon County's Financial Empowerment Blueprint focuses on enhancing access to existing services to promote financial empowerment through three priority areas with accompanying strategies and goals. Utilizing current Strategic Initiatives and existing partnerships, the County and its partners are implementing the strategies to achieve these goals.



## Housing and Residential Security Solutions

### **Goal**

Increase the inventory of safe and sanitary affordable housing for low-income individuals and families.

### **Strategies**

1. Support the housing rehabilitation and emergency repair programs to preserve affordable housing units.
2. Expand opportunities to provide educational workshops and legal assistance to alleviate heirs' property issues, support wealth building, and encourage home maintenance.
3. Support initiatives to increase affordable homeownership opportunities.

## Social Wellness and Support Services

### Goal

Expand the social safety net by increasing access to resources and services to enhance the quality of life of citizens.



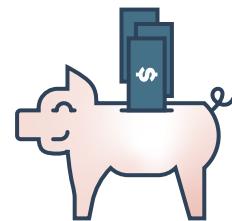
### Strategies

1. Enhance partnership with the 2-1-1 Big Bend Lyft Program to expand transportation access, including for those in Leon County's rural areas.
2. Strategically promote existing programs, such as the Leon County Primary Healthcare program and enrollment information, to reach the most vulnerable, including those impacted by the digital divide.
3. Collaborate with healthcare and mental health providers, including Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), to address community needs and provide access to primary, mental, and dental care, ensuring comprehensive health and human services are available.
4. Develop a Community Information Exchange platform in partnership with 2-1-1 Big Bend, the City of Tallahassee, United Way of the Big Bend, the Children's Services Council of Leon County, and other key stakeholders.

## Financial Education and Management Resources

### Goal

Expand access to safe and affordable financial services for citizens and businesses to promote financial stability and resources and enhance intergenerational wealth.



### Strategies

1. Support the integration of financial education and banking access within existing youth employment programs.
2. Explore the development of a Financial Empowerment Center.
3. Support the Bank On Tallahassee initiative via collaboration, resource support, and integration into existing programs to increase access to certified checking and transaction accounts by building programmatic partnerships between local financial institutions and community-serving programs, and encourage saving, investing, and financial counseling to further enhance financial stability for residents.
4. Support the Capital City Chamber of Commerce via the existing partnership with the Tallahassee-Leon County Office of Economic Vitality in creating and distributing a comprehensive small business development pipeline to increase access to resources and capital for businesses, including the assessment of current resources and barriers.

The identified priority areas and subsequent strategies incorporate and organize existing strategic planning documents and significant citizen and stakeholder feedback to provide a comprehensive guide to enhance community access to resources and ultimately increase financial opportunities and outcomes. The Blueprint reinforces ongoing efforts to expand access to human services and financial education, spur economic growth, and enhance generational wealth in neighborhoods that have historically experienced poverty and racial inequity.

The County and its partners have many existing programs and initiatives to promote financial empowerment. Further, stakeholders have undertaken efforts to increase awareness and knowledge of local resources through community committees, neighborhood plans, and outreach workers. This

Blueprint serves as a roadmap to expand current efforts and pursue additional opportunities that enhance financial security in the community.



## OVERVIEW OF CITYSTART

In February 2023, the County, in partnership with the City and the Capital City Chamber, was selected to participate in the CityStart initiative by the Cities for Financial Empowerment (CFE) Fund. The County was awarded a \$75,000 grant to support the creation of a financial empowerment Blueprint that builds upon collaborative efforts and community investment through a racial equity lens.

The CFE Fund's CityStart initiative is a structured approach to helping local governments develop a municipal Financial Empowerment Blueprint, which outlines a strategic plan for financial empowerment programs and policies (e.g., financial counseling, consumer protection, access to banking, asset building, etc.) based on stakeholder and community engagement.

The wealth equity-focused iteration of CityStart addresses the financial stability needs of residents and the opportunities to meet those needs, prioritizing individual and structural efforts for Black residents that foster wealth accumulation and mitigate wealth extraction. The CFE Fund works with Black-majority city and county partners, as well as cities and counties with significant Black populations, to address the financial stability needs of residents and the opportunities to meet those needs, prioritizing individual and structural efforts for Black residents that foster wealth accumulation and mitigate wealth extraction. The CFE Fund also works with grantees to identify the intersecting issues leading to disparities and barriers to financial stability.

The CityStart grant aligns with the County's efforts and commitment to addressing poverty and inequity in the community. The CFE CityStart grant advances the following Leon County FY2022-FY2026 Strategic Initiatives:

- Work with the City of Tallahassee on the development and implementation of the Neighborhood First Program to engage residents and develop plans to address poverty and inequity in targeted neighborhoods, including 32304. (2022-32)
- Partner with the City of Tallahassee, the Capital City Chamber, and local stakeholders to spur economic growth and financial security in the neighborhoods that have historically

experienced poverty and racial inequity through initiatives such as Bank On Tallahassee. (2023-3)

These Strategic Initiatives align with the Board's Quality of Life and Economic Strategic Priorities:

- (Q4) Support and promote access to primary and welfare services to our community members most in need.
- (EC2) Support programs, policies, and initiatives to attract, create, and promote expansion of business, entrepreneurship, job creation, workforce development, economic equity, and mobility.

## HISTORY AND CHALLENGES

### Wealth and Inequality in Leon County

In Leon County, Florida, the story of wealth is as complex as it is diverse. Like many regions, Leon County has historically experienced systemic inequalities that contributed to wealth disparities. These challenges have impacted the County's residents, particularly those from underserved communities, who continue to face barriers in achieving financial security. Recognizing the challenges many individuals and families in the community face, Leon County Government actively engages in transformative initiatives to promote financial empowerment and reduce inequality among its residents. Today, the County takes a proactive stance by addressing these legacies head-on, ensuring that such historical disparities do not define the future of its communities.



### Resident Feedback and Stakeholder Quotes

- *Community Voices:* During a 2023 community meeting in the Bond neighborhood, one resident shared, "We've been living here for generations, but without clear titles, we can't use our land to get loans or make improvements." This sentiment reflects the broader challenges faced by many in the community.
- *Stakeholder Feedback:* A local nonprofit leader noted, "Our financial education programs have made a difference, but we need more support from the County to reach all the families who need these resources."

### Reflecting Community Priorities:

- *Affordable Housing:* Feedback from the 2023 Tallahassee Housing Summit indicated strong community support for expanding affordable housing initiatives. Many residents emphasized the need for down payment assistance and legal support to resolve heirs' property issues.
- *Financial Education and Technical Assistance:* During the CityStart initiative's stakeholder engagement sessions, participants repeatedly stressed the importance of financial education, particularly for young people. One attendee stated, "Teaching our kids about money early on is key to breaking the cycle of poverty."

## EXAMPLES OF SYSTEMIC INEQUALITIES CONTRIBUTING TO WEALTH DISPARITIES

### Background

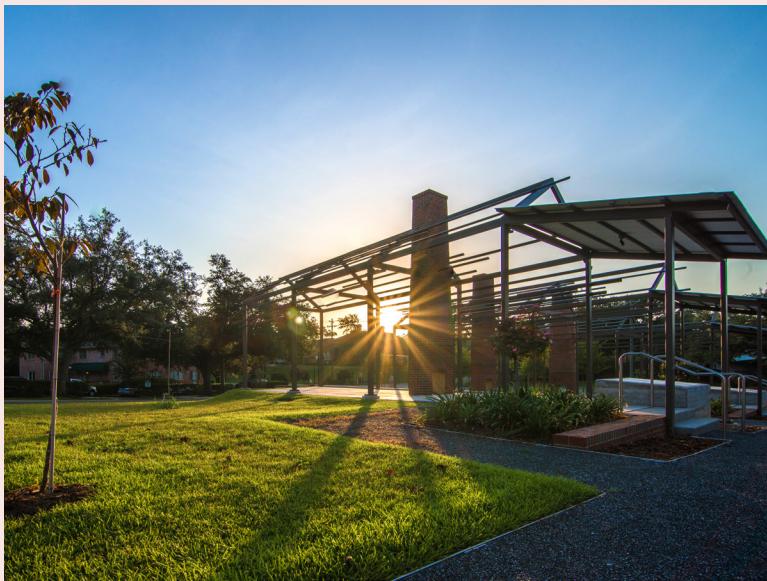
Systemic inequalities have manifested in various ways, both locally and nationally. In Leon County, historic segregation and discriminatory practices, such as racially restrictive covenants, have led to lasting disparities in homeownership and property values, disproportionately affecting Black communities. Redlining, the practice of denying loans or insurance based on race, has significantly disadvantaged these communities nationally, resulting in lower homeownership rates and depressed property values. A 2020 study by the National Community Reinvestment Coalition found that formerly redlined neighborhoods across the country still experience lower homeownership rates and property values compared to non-redlined areas, contributing to the racial wealth gap, with Black households having a median net worth of just 12% of white households. In 2019, the Black homeownership rate in Leon County was approximately 40%, while the rate for white residents was around 70% (U.S. Census data, 2019). Nationally, the Black homeownership rate was 42.1% in 2019, compared to 73.3% for white Americans (USAfacts, 2019). This indicates that Leon County's Black homeownership rate was slightly below the national average at that time. While these figures highlight persistent disparities resulting from historical segregation and discriminatory housing policies, they also underscore the need for continued efforts to promote equitable homeownership opportunities within the community. Leon County's goal is to meet and exceed the national average for Black homeownership through targeted initiatives and community support programs.

These disparities underscore the continued economic challenges faced by Black residents in historically marginalized communities. Black residents were often denied access to home loans and mortgages, which prevented them from purchasing property (a primary mechanism for building wealth). Additionally, Works Progress Administration (WPA) records indicate that neighborhoods were segregated by race, with Black communities relegated to less desirable areas. This segregation was often enforced through restrictive covenants and zoning laws and restricted access to mortgages and insurance for residents in predominantly black neighborhoods, limiting their ability to accumulate wealth through homeownership.

### History of Economic Disparity in Leon County

In Leon County, local restrictive covenants have historically contributed to the segregation of neighborhoods. These covenants, which were agreements embedded in property deeds to prevent the sale of property to Black individuals and other minorities, created racially homogeneous communities and exacerbated wealth disparities. For example, developers of neighborhoods that utilized Federal Housing Administration grants were required to include restrictive covenants to ban minorities from owning property within certain communities. While the U.S. Supreme Court ruled racial covenants unconstitutional in 1948 and the Federal Fair Housing Act of 1968 prohibited discrimination concerning the sale, rental, and financing of housing based on race, religion, national origin, or sex, some discriminatory language in property deeds and covenants have persisted. Therefore, in 2020, the Florida Legislature enacted a law that allowed for the removal of such language from property documents. This legislation acknowledged historical inequities and aligned with ongoing efforts at the County to foster a more inclusive and equitable community.

Additionally, federal urban renewal policies beginning in the 1950s disproportionately impacted black neighborhoods and displaced more than 300,000 families across the country. In Leon County, eminent domain and urban renewal projects in the 1950s and 1960s occurred



in Smokey Hollow, a black community that was located in present day Cascades Park near downtown Tallahassee. Eminent domain forced residents from their homes with insufficient compensation, preventing them from purchasing comparable properties and halting the intergenerational transfer of wealth, which disrupted racial wealth equity and wealth accumulation for Black families. This displacement scattered the community, fractured social networks crucial for economic stability, and relocated families to less desirable areas with fewer economic opportunities and

lower property values. These factors, coupled with poorer educational and employment prospects in the new neighborhoods, entrenched economic disparities and limited the ability of subsequent generations to accumulate and transfer wealth, perpetuating racial inequities in Leon County.

Further, discriminatory lending practices, such as those seen in the subprime mortgage crisis, disproportionately affected minority communities, leading to higher foreclosure rates and financial instability nationally. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, during the subprime mortgage crisis of 2008, Black and Hispanic borrowers were 70% more likely to experience foreclosure than their white counterparts. A 2008 Leon County Housing Finance Authority report cited evident disparities within Leon County. For instance, during the same period, foreclosure rates among Black and Hispanic homeowners were significantly higher than those of their white counterparts, with local data showing that minority borrowers were nearly twice as likely to face foreclosure.

Additionally, wage disparities and employment discrimination have consistently hindered wealth accumulation for minorities. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Black Americans earn approximately 84 cents for every dollar earned by white Americans, and Hispanic Americans earn about 76 cents for every dollar earned by their white counterparts, even when controlling for education and experience, perpetuating a cycle of economic disadvantage.

A 2021 Tallahassee-Leon County Planning Department report highlighted that Black residents in Leon County earn approximately 80 cents for every dollar earned by white residents, further exacerbating economic inequities, as indicated by data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey. Additionally, white, non-Hispanic households had 10 times more wealth than Black households according to the U.S. Census Bureau. In Tallahassee, this wealth gap is evident in homeownership rates, with white households almost twice as likely to own their homes compared to Black households, deepening the economic divide as outlined in the Tallahassee-Leon County Planning Department's 2021 report.

## Impacts of Economic Disparities in Education

In education, a lack of wealth equity and unequal opportunities can impact students in low-income areas, affecting job prospects and earning potential. The Leon County School District has a majority minority student population with approximately 40% white, 45% Black, 11% Hispanic, and 5% Asian students, while the overall population of Tallahassee is 54% white, 30% Black, 8%

Hispanic, and 4% Asian. Within the Leon County School District, over half of the schools were considered Title 1 in 2021, which means about 40 percent of students in the district come from low-income households. Many of these schools are in minority communities that have experienced historic economic disinvestment. Students at these Title I schools also have higher utilization rates of free or reduced lunch. Children who receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits automatically qualify for free and reduced lunch through the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. In addition, children may be eligible for free and reduced lunch if their families are earning at or below current Income Eligibility Guidelines established by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. In 2024, to qualify for free or reduced-price meals, families needed to be at or below 130% and 185% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines, respectively. Therefore, higher percentages of students receiving free or reduced lunch may signal economic hardship among their student populations.

These disparities in demographic distribution and economic indicators reflect an educational landscape where students from underserved communities in the County face challenges that impact job prospects and earning potential. This educational gap can affect long-term outcomes, as individuals from these communities may be less likely to access higher-paying jobs that require advanced degrees.

## Promoting Financial Equity in Leon County

Leon County, along with local partners, are actively addressing economic disparities and promoting financial equity through targeted initiatives. The Tallahassee-Leon County Office of Economic Vitality (OEV) plays a significant role by fostering economic growth and supporting minority- and women-owned businesses with funding opportunities, resources, and business development programs. These efforts include strategic investments in local economic projects and partnerships aimed at building an inclusive economy that provides equitable opportunities for all residents. Workforce development initiatives, carried out in collaboration with educational institutions and training centers, equip residents with skills and certifications needed for higher-paying jobs, thus helping to reduce income disparities. The County is also involved in affordable housing efforts, working alongside housing authorities and nonprofits to increase access to affordable housing and address wealth gaps reflected in homeownership rates.

Additionally, the Capital City Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with financial institutions, is working to offer financial literacy programs that empower residents by providing essential knowledge on budgeting, saving, and investing through its Financial Literacy Initiative. These comprehensive efforts underscore Leon County's commitment to promoting sustainable economic growth and equity across its communities.





## A Strategic Tool to Address Inequities

Leon County is committed to creating a more equitable future for all its residents by actively addressing these systemic issues through ongoing initiatives, including its participation in the CityStart initiative, that enhance financial security, expand access to financial services, and support entrepreneurship. These efforts aim to break the cycle of poverty and build a foundation for sustained economic growth and wealth accumulation.

As previously indicated, a critical component of the CityStart initiative is the development of this Financial Empowerment Blueprint, which outlines goals and strategies to enhance financial security and racial wealth equity within the community.

As outlined in the next section, the process for developing the Financial Empowerment Blueprint involved extensive stakeholder engagement and the evaluation of existing strategic plans to understand how to overcome historic inequities and promote financial security.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND EXISTING EFFORTS

The County, City, and Capital City Chamber conducted community engagement throughout the Blueprint development process. After the County received the CityStart Grant, the County worked with CFE Fund staff to conduct four stakeholder engagement sessions in Leon County. Stakeholders in this initiative included a diverse range of local business owners, financial institutions, nonprofit housing developers, and other interested partners (Appendix 2). These stakeholders met to discuss community needs, including improved access to housing, healthcare, financial resources, and employment opportunities. Preliminary priority areas were identified based on feedback from the stakeholder engagement sessions and local government planning documents to ensure that the initiatives reflected the most pressing needs of the community. These areas were chosen because they directly impact economic stability, community well-being, and the ability to reduce poverty and promote equitable growth, aligning with the goals of enhancing financial security and addressing systemic challenges.



The priority areas were presented in breakout sessions at the Financial Empowerment Summit in September 2023. The Financial Empowerment Summit focused on the community's financial landscape and was an opportunity to engage with additional stakeholders and community members. Breakout sessions at the Summit focused on the following five preliminary priority areas, where participants provided verbal and written feedback about local financial empowerment opportunities and current gaps in service.

- **Youth Income & Economic Mobility Category:** This category aims to provide young people with opportunities to increase their income and improve their economic prospects. This includes access to financial services and education, job training programs, internships, and entrepreneurial education.
- **Adult Income & Economic Mobility Category:** Similar to the youth-focused initiatives, this category's solutions target adults, increasing access to financial services, job placement services, continuing education opportunities, and support for career advancement.
- **Social Wellness & Support Category:** This category encompasses a broad range of services designed to support the overall well-being of individuals and families. It includes mental health services, substance-use treatment, family counseling, and access to healthcare.
- **Housing and Residential Security Category:** This category includes programming that assists with down payments, home repair and rehabilitation, weatherization, and housing counseling to help residents secure long-term housing stability.
- **Minority Small Business Economic Mobility Category:** This category focuses on providing minority-owned small businesses with the resources and opportunities they need to grow and succeed. It includes access to grants and loans, business development training, mentorship programs, and support for securing contracts and expanding market reach. These efforts help minority entrepreneurs overcome systemic barriers, build wealth, and contribute to their communities' economic vitality.

The Financial Empowerment Summit reinforced several key insights regarding the community's needs and priorities for promoting economic growth and financial security. A common theme throughout the discussions was the critical need for community awareness and access to information and resources to achieve financial empowerment. Additionally, participants emphasized the importance of creating pathways for wealth accumulation, particularly for historically underserved communities. By continuing to focus on these key areas, Leon County has developed a comprehensive approach to financial empowerment, fostering an environment where all residents can build wealth and achieve

economic security.

Furthermore, an analysis of existing strategic planning efforts including Neighborhood First Plans and other local initiatives was conducted to identify financial empowerment strategies that had already been prioritized by residents (Appendix 1). The City's Neighborhood First initiative assisted residents in developing and implementing strategic neighborhood plans to improve the social and economic outlook of targeted neighborhoods. These plans reflect the priorities of the neighborhoods, developed after extensive engagement with residents, and include strategies to reduce crime, enhance the quality of life, and increase economic prosperity. Other initiatives include the Breaking Bread Together community meetings, which identified barriers to food security and connected residents with essential resources; the FAMU Federal Credit Union SmartSteps Microloan Program, which has distributed more than \$1 million in loans to Black, minority, and women-owned businesses; and Bank On Tallahassee, which was created to connect unbanked and underbanked individuals to safe and appropriate financial products and services.

The information from the initial meetings, plan evaluations, and breakout sessions identified a crucial theme in financial empowerment efforts: enhancing awareness of and access to available resources.

This theme is addressed through the following three priority areas:

- Housing & Residential Security Solutions
- Social Wellness & Support Services
- Financial Education & Business Management Resources

The identification of the priority areas was strongly informed by stakeholder findings, Neighborhood First plans, and the ongoing work of the Trusted People Neighborhood Engagement Steering Committee, an initiative to connect human service providers and residents of the neighborhoods for greater awareness and access to available resources. Insights gained from these efforts emphasized the most urgent needs of the community.

During neighborhood engagement sessions and housing services workshops, residents consistently highlighted housing stability as a critical issue, particularly in the face of rising housing costs and a lack of affordable options. Additionally, the Trusted People Committee identified social wellness as essential for improving overall quality of life, citing a need for increased access to mental health services, substance abuse programs, and community-based support networks. The committee also played an instrumental role in gathering feedback and inviting community members to stakeholder engagement sessions to ensure that the voices of residents and neighborhood leaders were included in shaping these priorities. These efforts provided invaluable insights into the most urgent needs of our community.

The emphasis on financial education arose from stakeholder feedback emphasizing the need for long-term economic empowerment. Many community members expressed concerns about financial education, resource access, and sustainable wealth-building opportunities. This aligns with broader findings from the Neighborhood First initiative, where residents voiced the importance of equipping individuals and families with financial independence and resilience tools. These priorities were further echoed in our engagement with local leaders, who noted the lack of accessible financial services in underserved areas.

In terms of access, the Blueprint prioritizes the availability and accessibility of services and solutions to those who need them most. The strategies identify barriers to access, including geographical, economic, or informational, and how to address those barriers head-on. As such, each of the selected priority areas will be designed with inclusivity in mind, ensuring that every resident, particularly those in historically marginalized communities, can fully benefit from these resources and initiatives.

To effectively tackle these issues, it is essential to recognize the interconnected nature of these areas and how they collectively contribute to financial empowerment. By focusing on these priority areas, Leon County created a comprehensive strategy that not only addresses immediate needs but also paves the way for long-term economic stability and growth for all residents.

# FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT PRIORITIES AND STRATEGIES

While many programs and initiatives to promote financial empowerment exist, increased awareness of these resources is needed to ensure their effectiveness. The Blueprint prioritizes expanding access to services by focusing on housing and residential security solutions, social wellness and support services, and financial education and management resources. By addressing these underlying factors and confronting barriers to financial empowerment, Leon County can work toward building a more inclusive and equitable community where every resident can thrive.



The following sections will delve into each of these priority areas, providing more context to the specific priority and outlining specific strategies, initiatives, and success stories that illustrate how Leon County is making strides toward financial empowerment and racial wealth equity.

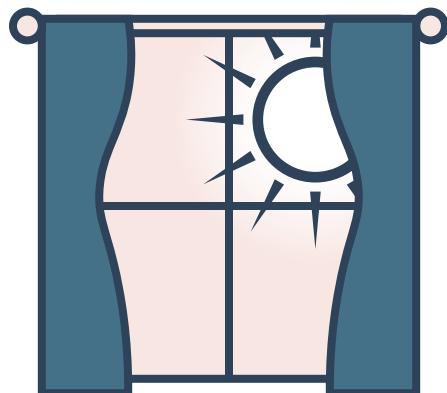
Leon County's Financial Empowerment Blueprint focuses on enhancing existing access to services to promote financial empowerment through three priority areas with the following goals. Through current Strategic Initiatives and existing partnerships, the County and its partners are implementing the subsequent strategies to achieve these goals.

- **Housing and Residential Security Solutions**
  - » Goal: Increase the inventory of safe and sanitary affordable housing for low-income individuals and families.
- **Social Wellness and Support Services**
  - » Goal: Expand the social safety net by increasing access to resources and services to enhance the quality of life of citizens.
- **Financial Education and Management Resources**
  - » Goal: Expand access to safe and affordable financial services for citizens and businesses to promote financial stability and resources and enhance intergenerational wealth.

## Housing and Residential Security Solutions

Housing insecurity is a significant barrier to wealth accumulation in Leon County, particularly for marginalized communities. Historic discriminatory housing practices, coupled with a shortage of affordable housing alternatives, perpetuate housing insecurity and homelessness. Without secure and stable housing, individuals and families struggle to build wealth, establish roots in the community, and achieve long-term financial security. Lower Black homeownership rates and the racial wealth gap stand as reminders of the enduring legacy of historical inequities, including lingering barriers related to historic policies.

Within Leon County, the issue of heirs' property significantly impacts Black families. Heirs' property refers to land or homes that are





inherited without a formal will or proper documentation, often through generations, leaving multiple descendants with divided ownership interests. This type of property ownership creates significant challenges for families, as it complicates the process of transferring wealth and capitalizing on the economic opportunities associated with property ownership. Without clear legal title, families face barriers to selling the property, securing loans, or accessing government assistance programs for home improvements.

The impact of heirs' property on racial wealth equity is profound. For example, in the southeastern United States, it is estimated that heirs' property accounts for over a third of Black-owned land, amounting to millions of acres. This phenomenon limits families' ability to build generational wealth and undermines efforts to achieve economic advancement. In rural areas, the inability to leverage property equity can prevent families from investing in education, starting businesses, or making significant home improvements. In urban settings, it can impede redevelopment efforts and diminish neighborhood revitalization initiatives.

Assisting residents to obtain a clear legal title is essential for municipalities to implement targeted community development strategies that promote homeownership and wealth accumulation. For instance, the Center for Heirs' Property Preservation has worked extensively in South Carolina to help families resolve title issues, thereby unlocking economic potential and preserving family legacies. By addressing heirs' property challenges, Leon County can support families in achieving financial stability and fostering economic mobility, thereby contributing to a more equitable and prosperous community for all residents.

Further, the lack of foundational wealth provided by homeownership severely hampers Black entrepreneurs' ability to access capital and resources necessary for business development. According to the Federal Reserve's 2021 Small Business Credit Survey, Black-owned firms were more likely to report difficulties in accessing credit and were twice as likely to be turned down for loans compared to white-owned firms. This is largely due to the lower homeownership rates among Black families, which reduces their ability to leverage home equity for business loans.

With secure and affordable housing, it becomes easier for individuals and families to accumulate wealth, establish a solid foundation in the community, and attain comprehensive financial security.

For example, Black renters experience significantly higher eviction rates compared to their white

counterparts. Nationally, Black renters have an average eviction filing rate of 6.2% and an eviction judgment rate of 3.4%. In contrast, white renters have an average filing rate of 3.4% and a judgment rate of 2.0% (Eviction Lab, 2023; Center for American Progress, 2021). Additionally, Black and Hispanic renter households were more than twice as likely to be behind on housing payments and at risk of eviction during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to white renter households (Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2021). These disparities highlight the systemic issues that contribute to housing instability among minority communities, which in turn disrupts children's education and perpetuates cycles of poverty and inequality. In Leon County, similar disparities exist, particularly in areas within the 32304 zip

code, where the poverty rate is one of the highest in the state. Specifically, Leon County's five census tracts with family household poverty rates of more than 40% are within the 32304 zip code. The U.S. Census considers census tracts with an overall poverty rate of 30% or more as high poverty areas. Additionally, according to U.S. Census data, neighborhoods within the 32304 zip code have the lowest percentage of home ownership (11.6%), lowest median household income (\$21,862), and the lowest average home values (\$177,459) compared to other Leon County zip codes. These disparities have led to years-long efforts by the County to address racial wealth equity within the communities of 32304.

Existing initiatives aimed at increasing homeownership rates among Black families in Leon County, such as down payment assistance programs and affordable housing developments, are essential in addressing these systemic inequities and fostering a more inclusive economy. Without generational wealth, families may face housing instability, leading to frequent moves and disruptions in children's education. This instability is exacerbated by the disproportionately high eviction rates faced by minority communities.

Homeownership is critical to wealth accumulation because it provides a stable asset that can appreciate over time, offering a foundation for financial security and economic mobility. According to the Federal Reserve's Survey of Consumer Finances, homeowners have a median net worth nearly 40 times greater than renters. This disparity underscores the importance of homeownership as a key driver of wealth. Moreover, a study by the Urban Institute found that homeownership significantly contributes to the intergenerational transmission of wealth, enabling families to pass down financial benefits to future generations. Additionally, home equity can be leveraged for essential investments such as education, business ventures, and home improvements, further enhancing financial stability and growth. In Leon County, increasing access to homeownership for underserved communities is addressing historical inequities and creating pathways for sustained wealth accumulation and economic advancement.

## **Local Context**

### **Housing and Residential Security:**

- *Housing Affordability:* The 2023 Tallahassee Housing Market Analysis found that 40% of renters in Leon County spend more than 30% of their income on housing, a situation that disproportionately affects Black and Hispanic families. This high cost of housing leaves little room for savings and wealth accumulation.
- *Heirs' Property Issues:* Local case studies from the Leon County Clerk of Courts and Comptroller indicate that heirs' property disputes are common in the Frenchtown area, where many Black families inherited land without clear titles. This has resulted in legal challenges that prevent these families from fully utilizing their property for wealth-building purposes.



## Goal

Increase the inventory of safe and sanitary affordable housing for low-income individuals and families.

## Strategies

- 1. Support the housing rehabilitation and emergency repair programs to preserve affordable housing units.**
  - » *Catalog Existing Programs:* 2-1-1 Big Bend maintains a database of existing and available programs, including the County's housing rehabilitation and emergency repair programs. In addition, human service agencies that receive County funding must coordinate with 2-1-1 Big Bend to ensure that program information is included in the database. This effort ensures that residents have easy access to up-to-date resources and assistance services.
  - » *Enhance Outreach:* Develop a targeted outreach campaign in coordination with the Trusted People Neighborhood Steering Committee to ensure that residents in underserved communities are aware of and can access these programs, including community meetings, flyer distribution at local schools, and social media campaigns.
  - » *Process Improvement:* Review and streamline the application process for County programs to make them more accessible. This could include simplifying forms, offering application assistance, and reducing turnaround times for repairs.
- 2. Expand opportunities to provide educational workshops and legal assistance to alleviate heirs' property issues, support wealth building, and encourage home maintenance.**
  - » *Partnership Development:* Partner with organizations like Legal Services of North Florida and the Center for Heirs' Property Preservation to offer recurring workshops on heirs' property issues. Workshops could include legal information, opportunities to help families clear title issues, and resources for home maintenance.
  - » *Resource Creation:* Strategies identified in the City's Neighborhood First Plans, such as the development of toolkits for residents that includes information on legal resources, steps for clearing property titles, and best practices for home maintenance.
  - » *Community Engagement:* Continue to host community forums to discuss heirs' property challenges and gather input on additional support needs.
- 3. Support initiatives to increase affordable homeownership opportunities.**
  - » *Process Development:* Continue to engage the Affordable Housing Advisory Committee and other stakeholders to evaluate and enhance Leon County's Homeownership Development Program and other housing initiatives.
  - » *Program Expansion:* Explore opportunities to develop additional programs aimed at increasing affordable homeownership opportunities, including leveraging funding through the HUD PRO Housing grant.
  - » *Capacity Building:* Work with the Tallahassee Lenders' Consortium and other partners to expand access to affordable mortgages and financial education programs.

## Potential Partners

- 2-1-1 Big Bend
- Legal Services of North Florida
- Tallahassee Lenders' Consortium
- Center for Heirs' Property Preservation

## Social Wellness and Support Services

Generational wealth, which includes assets such as homeownership, savings, investments, and other valuable resources passed down from one generation to the next, plays a crucial role in breaking the cycle of poverty and providing families with a financial head start. This wealth allows families to invest in education, start businesses, and secure better housing, all of which contribute to long-term financial stability and upward mobility. Children who inherit even modest amounts of wealth are more likely to achieve higher levels of education, secure better-paying jobs, and build more substantial wealth themselves. A 2019 report by the Brookings Institute highlights that the median wealth of white families is 10 times greater than that of Black families, largely due to historical and ongoing barriers to building and transferring generational wealth.



However, the lack of generational wealth can severely limit access to critical resources, hinder social mobility, and jeopardize financial security. Without inherited assets, individuals and communities often struggle to access quality education, healthcare, and housing. This deficit makes it challenging to accumulate wealth and escape the cycle of poverty. In such scenarios, social wellness and support services become essential for bridging the gap.

In communities with high levels of poverty, like those in Leon County, a significant number of residents frequently lack access to these vital social wellness and support services. This lack exacerbates difficulties associated with community resilience, social cohesion, and mental health. Additionally, the absence of financial security can result in increased stress and mental health issues, further hindering individuals' ability to thrive and contribute to their communities. The lack of adequate access to mental health services, social support networks, and community resources can significantly hinder the capacity of individuals to manage financial stressors, navigate through life transitions, and establish robust social connections.

A lack of access to services can also lead to negative health outcomes. In Leon County, a devastating example of this is poor maternal healthcare and infant mortality rates in part due to a lack of prenatal and postpartum care. Between 2018 and 2020, the infant mortality rate of Black women was 12.6 deaths per 1,000 births compared to five deaths per 1,000 births for their white counterparts in the Capital City Healthy Start program. In community conversations, several organizations and individuals have indicated that part of the barrier for women to access the necessary healthcare for themselves and their babies was due to the inability to secure transportation to appointments.

Moreover, providing mental health services, establishing social support networks, and championing community-based organizations can augment residents' social well-being and resilience, cultivating an environment conducive to financial empowerment. Local government and community partners are supporting these efforts by expanding transportation options, creating more robust information sharing to ease access to services, and promoting existing resources. The Blueprint provides a framework to expand the social safety and improve access to essential resources and services.

## Local Context

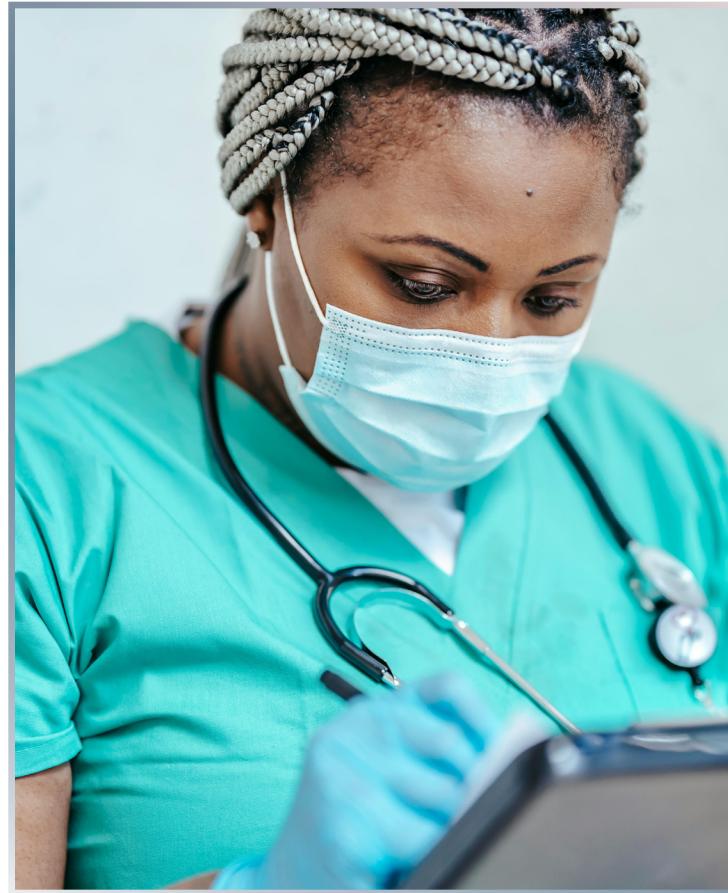
The 2023 Leon County Health Equity Assessment reveals that Black residents in Leon County face higher rates of chronic illness such as hypertension and diabetes, with 35% of Black adults diagnosed with hypertension compared to 22% of white adults. Additionally, Black residents are more likely to be uninsured and have less access to healthcare services, which further exacerbates health outcomes and economic disparities. These health indicators reflect the interconnectedness of wealth, access to resources, and overall well-being in the community.

## Goal

Expand the social safety net by increasing access to resources and services to enhance the quality of life of citizens.

## Strategies

- 1. Enhance partnership with the 2-1-1 Big Bend Lyft Program to expand transportation access, including for those in Leon County's rural areas.**
  - » *Coordination:* Continue to meet with 2-1-1 Big Bend to discuss the current scope of the Lyft program and identify potential areas for expansion, particularly in rural areas where transportation options are limited.
  - » *Needs Assessment:* Collaborate with local community leaders, residents, and community organizations in rural areas to understand specific transportation needs.
  - » *Program Expansion:* Provide dedicated funding to 2-1-1 Big Bend for the Lyft Program to expand service provision through increased trips. Monitor the number of trips, including in unincorporated Leon County, to determine how residents are engaging with the program, including the services they are accessing through Lyft rides.
- 2. Strategically promote existing programs, such as the Leon County Primary Healthcare Program and enrollment information, to reach the most vulnerable, including those impacted by the digital divide.**
  - » *Community Engagement:* Organize in-person outreach events in communities heavily impacted by the digital divide. This could include participation in community meetings and events, door-to-door outreach through the Trusted People Neighborhood Steering Committee, and partnerships with local organizations to distribute information.
- 3. Collaborate with healthcare and mental health providers, including Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), to address community needs and provide access to primary, mental, and dental care, ensuring comprehensive health and human services are available.**
  - » *Regular Meetings:* Participate in quarterly meetings with key healthcare and mental health providers to discuss ongoing needs, challenges, and opportunities for collaboration based on the latest Community Health Assessments created by Capital Area Healthy Start, Tallahassee Memorial Healthcare, and the Department of Health.
  - » *Catalog Existing Programs:* 2-1-1 Big Bend maintains a database of existing and available programs, including the County's health and human services programs. In addition, health and human service agencies that receive County funding must coordinate with





2-1-1 Big Bend to ensure that program information is included in the database. This effort ensures that residents have easy access to up-to-date resources and assistance services.

**4. Develop a Community Information Exchange platform in partnership with 2-1-1 Big Bend, the City of Tallahassee, United Way of the Big Bend, the Children's Services Council of Leon County, and other key stakeholders.**

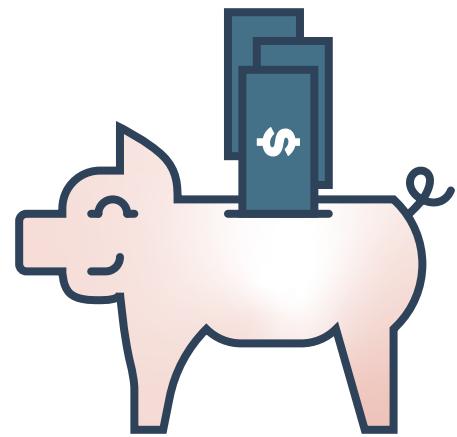
- » *Platform Development:* Convene a working group of program specialists, community organizations, and end-users to explore the feasibility of a Community Information Exchange platform. This group will assess the functionality of a central hub, how it can best serve the community, and the challenges of maintaining and updating the exchange. The goal is to ensure the platform, if implemented, is practical, user-friendly, and accessible across various devices, while also addressing the complexities of keeping the information current and relevant.
- » *Data Integration:* Partner with 2-1-1 Big Bend to integrate data from other organizations into the platform, including client data, eligibility criteria, and program availability.
- » *Promotion and Training:* Partner with 2-1-1 Big Bend to promote the platform, including training sessions for community organizations and residents on how to use the platform effectively.

**Potential Partners**

- 2-1-1 Big Bend
- Children's Services Council of Leon County
- Health and Human Service Providers
- United Way of the Big Bend

## Financial Education and Management Resources

The intricate relationship between income inequality and social mobility comes sharply into focus in Leon County. The National Bureau of Economic Research found that higher levels of income inequality within a community are associated with lower levels of economic mobility. This means that children of highly paid individuals are more likely to remain highly paid, while children of low-paid individuals are more likely to stay in low-earning positions. Additionally, education emerges as a crucial mechanism driving economic mobility. According to a study by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, there is a correlation between low educational scores in math, reading, and science and income inequality. In Leon County, disparities in academic achievement mirror the broader income inequality, potentially limiting opportunities for upward economic mobility among marginalized communities.



Similarly, numerous residents encounter obstacles when attempting to obtain comprehensive financial management resources, with marginalized communities particularly affected. A lack of access to services impedes the ability to plan for long-term economic stability, make informed financial decisions, and effectively manage debt. Inadequate assistance and direction may also hinder individuals' ability to navigate intricate financial systems, thereby contributing to the continuation of cycles of economic vulnerability and inequality.

A recent survey of physical locations of financial institutions highlighted that historically Black neighborhoods in Leon County, such as Frenchtown, have fewer or no banking options but are saturated with high-interest lenders. According to a 2019 report by the Tallahassee-Leon County Planning Department, there are significantly fewer bank branches in these neighborhoods compared to predominantly white areas. In contrast, these neighborhoods have an abundance of payday lenders and check-cashing services, which often charge exorbitant interest rates. This disparity limits access to capital and safe lending institutions, perpetuating financial insecurity and hindering economic mobility. Additionally, there is a positive correlation between bank branch presence in low-income neighborhoods and mortgage loan originations, which not only supports home ownership but also is associated with greater availability of credit. Additionally, according to Pew Charitable Trusts, although Black Americans make up only 13.6 percent of the US population, Black consumers represent 23 percent of storefront payday loan customers.

To address these financial disparities, the Capital City Chamber, in partnership with the County and City, launched the Bank On Tallahassee initiative in September 2022. Bank On Tallahassee aims to provide underserved communities with access to safe and affordable banking services. By providing access to safe and affordable certified checking and transaction accounts, coupled with financial education, Bank On Tallahassee aims to improve financial stability among residents. The coalition focuses on building programmatic partnerships to expand banking access while complementing these efforts with initiatives that help residents build credit, manage debt, and save for the future. To date, the program has engaged more than 1,000 residents through financial management workshops and individual counseling sessions, empowering them to achieve greater financial resilience.

Leon County's 32304 zip code is often highlighted as one of the most economically challenged areas in Florida, characterized by high poverty rates and limited access to resources. The area is home to a significant portion of the student population due to its proximity to Florida State University and Florida A&M University, but it also includes many long-term residents who face economic hardship. Current efforts by the County to address these challenges include targeted economic development projects, community revitalization programs, and partnerships with local organizations aimed at improving financial literacy and access to resources.

Additionally, in coordination and partnership with the Capital City Chamber of Commerce and FAMU Federal Credit Union, in 2021, Leon County Government launched the SmartSteps microloan program

through the Tallahassee-Leon County Office Economic Vitality (OEV). To date, more than \$1 million in loans has been distributed to 51 Black-, minority-, and women-owned businesses through the SmartSteps microloan program, with more than \$261,525 directed to businesses within the 32304 zip code.

Enhancing the availability of financial management resources through community-based programs, seminars, and online platforms will provide more opportunities to connect with underserved communities. By investing in financial education initiatives, such as Bank On Tallahassee, as well as social supports that prioritize marginalized communities, Leon County is building economic growth, narrowing the income gap, and creating a more equitable environment where every individual can thrive and realize their full potential.

## **Local Context**

- **Income Disparities:** According to the 2023 Tallahassee-Leon County Economic Vitality Report, the median household income for Black families in Leon County is \$34,000, significantly lower than the \$65,000 median for white families. This income disparity mirrors national trends and highlights the local impact of systemic inequality.

## **Goal**

Expand access to safe and affordable financial services for citizens and businesses to promote financial stability and resources and enhance intergenerational wealth.

## **Strategies**

- 1. Support the integration of financial education and banking access within existing youth employment programs.**
  - » *Program Analysis:* Evaluate current financial education and banking access within County youth employment programs, including Summer Youth and Junior Apprenticeship.
  - » *Integration of Financial Education and Banking Access:* In partnership with Bank On Tallahassee, collaborate with local banks, credit unions, and financial education nonprofits to design financial education modules that can be integrated into County youth employment programs. Additionally, build in opportunities for safe banking access, such as certified account openings, to ensure youth not only gain financial knowledge but also have access to secure, affordable banking services to support their financial stability and growth.
  - » *Community Collaboration:* Collaborate with other providers of youth employment programs, including the City of Tallahassee and the Children's Services Council of Leon County, to share information about outcomes and best practices to enhance each program.
- 2. Explore the development of a Financial Empowerment Center.**
  - » *Initial Planning Phase:* Participate in Phase 1 of the Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund Financial Empowerment Center Academy, led by the Capital City Chamber of Commerce, to explore the feasibility of opening a financial empowerment center in Leon County.
- 3. Support the Bank On Tallahassee initiative via collaboration, resource support, and integration into existing programs to increase access to certified checking and transaction accounts by building programmatic partnerships between local financial institutions and community-serving programs, and encourage saving, investing, and financial counseling to further enhance financial stability for residents.**
  - » *Partnership Coordination:* Through Bank On Tallahassee, coordinate community discussions with key partners, including libraries, community centers, and financial institutions, to discuss and plan the integration of banking access and financial education into existing programs and services.

- » *Program Implementation:* In partnership with the Capital City Chamber of Commerce, continue to develop a series of workshops and events focused on financial education and credit building.
- » *Collaborative Meetings:* Meet regularly with the Bank On Tallahassee team to integrate their services into existing County programs. This includes exploring ways to incorporate Bank On materials into youth employment programs, financial literacy workshops, and community events.



Bank On Tallahassee, having participated in the Bank On Academy, is also a recipient of the Capacity Grant from the Cities for Financial Empowerment (CFE) Fund, which supports the coalition's leadership and expansion efforts.

- » *Resource Allocation:* County staff supports the ongoing expansion of Bank On Tallahassee's outreach, particularly in underserved communities. The CFE Fund's Capacity Grant is currently providing critical capacity-building support, helping to increase the number of certified accounts and developing new programmatic integrations. County support will focus on amplifying these efforts through promotion and technical support.
- » *Awareness Campaign:* A targeted awareness campaign, led by the Capital City Chamber of Commerce, will inform residents, especially those in areas with high rates of unbanked or underbanked individuals, about the benefits of the Bank On initiative. This campaign will complement the ongoing efforts funded by the CFE Capacity Grant, ensuring that more residents gain access to safe and affordable banking options.

#### **4. Support the Capital City Chamber of Commerce in creating a comprehensive small business development pipeline to increase access to resources and capital for businesses, including the assessment of current resources and barriers.**

- » *Resource Assessment:* Conduct a thorough assessment of the current resources available to small businesses in Leon County, including financial services, mentorship opportunities, and educational programs.
- » *Capital Readiness Program:* Capital City Chamber of Commerce in partnership with the Tallahassee-Leon County Office of Economic Vitality and Florida A&M University Small Business Development Center to design and promote a small business development pipeline that addresses these barriers and guides businesses through the stages of growth, from startup to expansion.
- » *Pilot Initiative:* The Capital City Chamber of Commerce will explore the launch of a pilot program that focuses on one key area of the pipeline, such as access to capital or mentorship.
- » *Outreach and Engagement:* Continue the comprehensive outreach strategy to connect small businesses with the resources available through the pipeline (See Appendix 4).
- » *Tracking and Evaluation:* Continue to monitor how many small businesses are connected to resources via the pipeline.

#### **Potential Partners**

- Children's Services Council of Leon County
- FAMU Federal Credit Union Smart Steps Program
- Florida A&M University Small Business Development Center
- Greater Tallahassee Chamber of Commerce

## Ongoing Community Feedback

Following the development of the priority areas, stakeholders presented financial empowerment priorities and subsequent strategies at a neighborhood meeting that included the Trusted People Neighborhood Engagement Committee. The meeting focused on existing financial empowerment efforts, opportunities to enhance current initiatives, and answered questions about the financial empowerment plan. Additionally, the community meeting provided information about how the proposed financial strategies correlate to the existing Neighborhood First planning documents created for the Frenchtown, Greater Bond, Griffin Heights, and Providence communities. Community feedback indicated support of the strategies and identified additional partners to support the implementation process (Appendix 3).

To ensure ongoing engagement and alignment with the Neighborhood First Plan efforts, the committee committed to continuous collaboration with neighborhood residents and stakeholders. Regular follow-up meetings and updates will be scheduled to track progress, gather further input, and adjust strategies as needed. This continuous engagement ensures that the financial empowerment strategies remain responsive to community needs and are effectively integrated into the broader goals of the Neighborhood First Plans. By maintaining an open dialogue and fostering strong partnerships, the initiative aims to build a sustainable framework for financial empowerment that benefits all residents, strengthens community ties, and promotes long-term economic resilience in the Frenchtown, Greater Bond, Griffin Heights, and Providence neighborhoods.

Moreover, the continued engagement with the Neighborhood First initiative ties into the broader objectives of addressing poverty and inequity, as outlined in County and City strategic planning documents. For instance, by attending and participating in Neighborhood First meetings, the County can share resources that may address community needs and also utilize feedback to enhance programs. Additionally, efforts to increase homeownership and housing rehabilitation resources, as well as expanding youth employment and educational opportunities, align with strategies identified in the Greater Bond and Griffin Heights Neighborhood First plans. This integrated approach ensures that financial empowerment is not just an isolated effort but part of a comprehensive plan to uplift and sustain the community.

## ROLE OF LEON COUNTY

Leon County Government will play a pivotal role in advancing the Financial Empowerment Blueprint. The County's responsibilities will be structured across the following areas:

### 1. Leadership and Oversight:

- » *Departments Involved:* The Office of Human Services and Community Partnerships (HSCP) will spearhead the implementation of the Blueprint, with support from additional County departments, including Library Services and the Tallahassee-Leon County Office of Economic Vitality.
- » *Senior Leadership:* County Administration and the Director of HSCP will provide oversight, ensuring that the Blueprint aligns with the County's Strategic Initiatives and Bold Goals.

### 2. Community and Stakeholder Engagement

- » The County will continue to convene stakeholders from various sectors, including local businesses, nonprofit organizations, financial institutions, and community groups to ensure ongoing collaboration and alignment of efforts.
- » *Ongoing Communication:* The County will ensure continuous communication with residents through participation in the City's Neighborhood First meetings and coordination of the Trusted People Neighborhood Steering Committee to gather feedback and make necessary adjustments to programs.
- » *Public Information Campaigns:* The County, in partnership with 2-1-1 Big Bend, will promote available resources and how residents can access those resources.



### **3. Resource Allocation:**

- » *Funding:* The County will continue to invest in the development of programs and initiatives that support financial security in the community through its ongoing Strategic Initiatives.
- » *Grants and Partnerships:* The County will continue to seek grant opportunities and form partnerships to expand the reach and impact of its programs.

### **4. Monitoring and Evaluation:**

- » *Tracking Progress:* The County will continue to track program performance outcomes to monitor and evaluate the progress of each initiative.
- » *Reporting:* The County will provide reports on the progress of initiatives through strategic plan updates and status reports in accordance with program policies and procedures.

### **5. Specific Actions Under Each Priority:**

- » *Housing and Residential Security Solutions:* The County will continue to staff the Affordable Housing Advisory Committee, pursue funding opportunities to address barriers to affordable housing, and work closely with local housing authorities and nonprofit developers.
- » *Social Wellness and Support Services:* The County will continue to coordinate with mental health providers and social service agencies to expand access to critical services, particularly in underserved areas.
- » *Financial Education and Management Resources:* The County will support the Capital City Chamber of Commerce's efforts to integrate financial education into existing programs, with an emphasis on reaching youth and low-income families through outreach and participation in Bank On Tallahassee meetings.



## A PATH FORWARD

Leon County's comprehensive approach, rooted in community engagement and strategic partnerships, exemplifies a committed effort to transform historical challenges into opportunities for growth and empowerment. By incorporating feedback from a diverse range of stakeholders, including local business owners, financial educators, and residents, the County is continually refining its strategies to meet the specific needs of its community. This collaborative approach ensures that programs are relevant and practical, marking a significant shift toward inclusive community development.

Central to the County's strategy is improving access to essential and existing resources that empower its residents with the tools needed for economic stability and growth. This includes increasing housing stability, enhancing social wellness and support services, and bolstering financial management resources.

Housing remains a pivotal area of focus, with initiatives to combat housing insecurity and promote residential stability by fostering policies that encourage fair and secure housing opportunities for all residents. These approaches not only aid in wealth accumulation but also create stable environments for families to thrive. Leon County is enhancing the infrastructure of its support services to address resident well-being.

Recognizing that financial stress can undermine personal and community health, the County is expanding access to mental health services and social support networks. These efforts are crucial to building resilience and enabling residents to pursue financial autonomy without undue stress.

In addition, the County is committed to ensuring residents receive financial education resources by supporting programs, including the BankOn Tallahassee initiative, that provide comprehensive training in budgeting, saving, and investing. These initiatives are designed to equip residents, particularly those from historically marginalized communities, with the knowledge and tools to navigate financial systems effectively and securely.

This Financial Empowerment Blueprint incorporates the County's ongoing goals and strategies aimed at enhancing financial security and promoting racial wealth equity within the community, ultimately connecting shared prosperity moving forward to resiliency. The County recognizes its historical challenges and is committed to transforming them into opportunities for growth and empowerment. By addressing key areas such as financial management, social supports, and housing stability, the County is paving the way for a more inclusive and financially secure future for all of its residents.

## APPENDIX 1

### Plan Comparison: Financial Empowerment and Wealth Building Strategies

#### *Focus Area: Homeownership/Housing*

##### **Leon County Strategic Plan**

Support and promote access to basic healthcare, mental health, affordable housing, and homeless prevention services to our community members most in need. (Q4)

##### **City of Tallahassee Strategic Plan**

Objective 2b: Rehabilitate and Enhance the Existing Housing Inventory to Reduce the Cost of Living.

1. Number of homes served annually by energy efficiency grants, audits, and rebates to improve affordability and reduce homeownership housing costs. Target: 6,000
2. Number of homes rehabilitated and/or receiving emergency repair. Target: 425

Objective 2C: Facilitate and Encourage the Construction of Affordable Housing Units.

1. Number of new affordable homes or rental units built through the Community Land Trust. Target: 35
2. Number of new homes built as a result of inclusionary housing programs. Target: 60
3. Number of Habitat for Humanity homes built by City employees. Target: 10
4. Number of down payment assistance grants awarded, creating pathways to home ownership. Target: 125
5. Secure funding for Purpose Built Community and redevelopment of an additional 200 dwelling units at the Orange Avenue Housing Complex.

#### **32304 Summit Documents**

- 3.1 Establish specific housing needs
- 3.3 Preserve existing affordable, safe sanitary housing stock
- 3.3 Create/Diversify New Affordable Workforce Housing Units

Community Land Trust, Emergency Home Repair

##### **Frenchtown Neighborhood First Plan**

Promote the repair and reuse of existing structures. (Strategy H 1.1)

Develop vacant lots and abandoned homes with new housing. (Strategy H 2.1)

Create a dedicated funding source for the development of single-family homes. (Strategy H 2.2)

Assist families that have inherited homes in the neighborhood to obtain a clear title and preserve the home. (Strategy H 3.1)

Increase services that prepare residents for homeownership in the neighborhood. (Strategy H 5.1)

##### **Griffin Heights Neighborhood First Plan**

Connect residents to existing homeownership resources by inviting providers to neighborhood events and promoting their services via social media. (Strategy ED&RE 3.1)

Create connections and secure resources that support existing renters within Griffin Heights to become homeowners in the neighborhood. (Strategy ED&RE 3.2)

##### **Greater Bond Neighborhood First Plan**

Increase access to homeownership and housing rehabilitation resources. (ED&RE Strategy 5.2)

Coordinate with nonprofit organizations that assist with helping homeowners address dilapidated, substandard, and/or abandoned structures or lots (physical assistance with home rehabilitation). (NS&CP Action Item 4.1.4)

## APPENDIX 1

### Plan Comparison: Financial Empowerment and Wealth Building Strategies

#### Focus Area: Small Business

##### Leon County Strategic Plan

###### Priority:

Economy: Support programs, policies and initiatives to attract, create, and promote expansion of business, entrepreneurship, job creation, workforce development, economic equity and mobility (EC2).

(EC2) Implement the recommendations from the joint County/ City disparity study to be completed in FY 2022.

Target: Increase the number of certified MWSBEs by 30% (T4)

##### 32304 Summit Documents

Smart Steps microloan- more funding

1.2.1 OEV Disparity study recommendations

##### Frenchtown Neighborhood First Plan

Develop alternative sources of funding for small business financing. (Strategy ED&CR 1.1)

Prepare entrepreneurs for opportunities to receive financing through education, coaching and credit counseling. (Strategy ED&CR 1.2)

Increase access to entrepreneurship training and small business financing. Support business incubation and development. (Strategy ED&CR 2.1)

Reduce barriers to developing businesses within Frenchtown and support small enterprises. (Strategy ED&CR 2.2)

Provide opportunities for neighborhood-scale commercial development to take place in the neighborhood so that residents have more places to work, shop and recreate in their own neighborhood. (Strategy ED&CR 3.1)

Provide incentives for Frenchtown residents to expand their existing and/or develop new businesses within the neighborhood. (Strategy ED&CR 4.1)

##### Griffin Heights Neighborhood First Plan

Support the development and incubation of businesses within the neighborhood. (Strategy ED&RE 1.1)

Increase access to entrepreneurship training and small business financing. (Strategy ED&RE 1.2)

##### Greater Bond Neighborhood First Plan

Identify and promote specific locations for commercial development. (ED&RE Strategy 1.1)

## APPENDIX 1

### Plan Comparison: Financial Empowerment and Wealth Building Strategies

#### **Focus Area: Youth/Adult Employment**

##### **Leon County Strategic Plan**

Target: Connect 7,000 students to skilled job opportunities through Leon Works and other talent development initiatives. (T3)

##### **City of Tallahassee Strategic Plan**

Objective 2a: Support education, training, and job readiness for target populations.

1. Percent reduction of disconnected youth.  
Target: 30%
2. Number of TFLA participants that have moved on to higher education, trade school, certification programs, or military over a five-year period. Target: 500
3. Number of TEMPO participants enrolled in a technical college or higher education institution over a five-year period. Target: 150
4. Number of TEMPO participants that have found employment paying a “fair” or “living wage” over a five-year period.  
Target: 100
5. Number of TEMPO participants completing a GED over a five-year period.  
Target: 150

##### **32304 Summit Documents**

Leon Works- integrating/enhancing banking access and financial education

**7.2.2** Expand summer youth employment for disadvantaged youth

##### **Frenchtown Neighborhood First Plan**

Promote and enhance programs and trainings for youth and adults to gain access to educational, vocational and employment opportunities. (Strategy H&RE 5.1)

##### **Griffin Heights Neighborhood First Plan**

Introduce youth to entrepreneurship through job shadowing, apprenticeships, and mentoring. (Strategy ED&RE 1.3)

Increase opportunities for residents to access educational, vocational and employment resources. (Strategy ED&RE 2.2)

##### **Greater Bond Neighborhood First Plan**

Promote and enhance mechanisms for youth and adults to obtain a GED or high school diploma, higher education, job training, and employment. (ED&RE Strategy 3.1)

##### **Providence Plan**

Ensure the youth of Providence are engaged and connected to educational and employment opportunities through improved access to mentoring and tutoring programs. (HS&ED Strategy 3)

## APPENDIX 1

### Plan Comparison: Financial Empowerment and Wealth Building Strategies

#### Focus Area: Re-entry/Fines and fees

##### 32304 Summit Documents

- 2.1 Reduce High Incarceration Rates (Fines, fees covered here)
- 2.2 Remove barriers to working, housing, etc. (License revocation)

##### Frenchtown Neighborhood First Plan

Connect formerly incarcerated residents with the services and resources needed to make their reentry successful. (Strategy H&RE 6.1)

##### Griffin Heights Neighborhood First Plan

Assess and address barriers to the above services for special populations (ex: Opportunity Youth and residents returning from incarceration). (Strategy ED&RE 2.3)

#### Focus Area: General/Other Financial Empowerment

##### Leon County Strategic Plan

(Q2, Q5) Work with the City of Tallahassee on the development and implementation of the Neighborhood First Program to engage residents and develop plans to address poverty and inequity in targeted neighborhoods including 32304.

financial education as a requirement to access matching funds. (Action Item ED&CR 5.1.2)

##### City of Tallahassee Strategic Plan

Priority: Impact on Poverty

Locate a Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) site within the neighborhood. Secure funds to offer incentives for residents to save part of their tax refund. (Action Item ED&CR 5.1.3)

##### 32304 Summit Documents

Increase Promise Zone funding in CHSP

Advocate for the development of a matched children's savings account program in local schools paired with age-appropriate financial education. (Ex: San Francisco's Kindergarten to College program) (Action Item ED&CR 5.1.4)

##### Frenchtown Neighborhood First Plan

Develop programming to assist residents in building financial assets. (Strategy ED&CR 5.1)

##### Griffin Heights Neighborhood First Plan

Develop and launch a "Frenchtown Builds Credit" initiative to provide neighborhood-based credit building and financial coaching services to residents. (Action Item ED&CR 5.1.1)

Work with City and County departments and nonprofit partners to secure funding for neighborhood projects. (Strategy F 1.2)

Develop and implement a structured, matched savings program for residents to save for the purchase of a vehicle or home or education or small business expenses. Include ongoing

##### Greater Bond Neighborhood First Plan

Work with service providers to offer additional services and events (i.e., mental health, financial education, and record expungement) within the neighborhood and target promotion efforts to the community. (ED&RE Action Item 4.1.3)

## APPENDIX 1

### Plan Comparison: Financial Empowerment and Wealth Building Strategies

#### Internal Work Group:

1. Abigail Thomas: Director, Leon County Office of Human Services and Community Partnerships
2. Marcus West: Neighborhood Engagement and Community Partnership Manager, Leon County Office of Human Services and Community Partnerships
3. Jelani Marks: Housing Services Manager, Leon County Office of Human Services and Community Partnerships
4. Shington Lamy: Assistant County Administrator, Leon County Government
5. Katrina Tuggerson: President, Capital City Chamber of Commerce/Bank On Tallahassee Coalition
6. Anaje Austin: Equity Research Coordinator, Capital City Chamber of Commerce/Bank On Tallahassee Coalition
7. Dr. LaTanya White: Racial Equity x Entrepreneurship Expert, Capital City Chamber of Commerce/Bank On Tallahassee Coalition
8. Pamela Monroe: Director, LeRoy Collins Leon County Public Library System
9. Teresa Broxton: Director, Leon County Office of Intervention and Detention Alternatives
10. Darryl Jones: Deputy Director, Tallahassee-Leon County Office of Economic Vitality Minority, Women, & Small Business Enterprise Division
11. Allie Fleming: Manager, StarMetro Special Transit Projects & Communications
12. Adam Jacobs: Manager, City of Tallahassee Sustainability & Resilience
13. James Barnes: General Manager, City of Tallahassee Customer Account Services
14. Jean Amison: Manager, City of Tallahassee Housing Division
15. Anita Morrell: Manager, City of Tallahassee Human Services Division
16. John Baker: Manager, City of Tallahassee Neighborhood Affairs
17. Leann Watts Williams: Supervisor, City of Tallahassee Neighborhood Affairs Division Parks, Recreation & Neighborhood Affairs Department
18. Angela Hendrieth: Director, City of Tallahassee Diversity & Inclusion
19. Stephen Cox: Executive Director, Tallahassee Community Redevelopment Agency
20. Paula DeBoles-Johnson: Manager, Leon County Human Resources
21. Artie White: Director, Tallahassee-Leon County Planning Department
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## APPENDIX 2

### Community Stakeholders

#### **Government Stakeholder Map: Organizations**

- Leon County School District
- Children's Services Council of Leon County
- Leon County Property Appraiser
- Leon County Sheriff's Office
- Court Administration
- Leon County Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller
- Tallahassee Police Department
- Council on the Status of Men and Boys
- Commission on the Status of Women and Girls

#### **Small Business Stakeholder Map: Organizations**

- Big Bend Minority Chamber of Commerce
- Greater Tallahassee Chamber of Commerce
- Network of Entrepreneurs & Business Advocates
- Envision Credit Union
- VyStar Credit Union
- First Commerce Credit Union
- The First Bank
- Self-Help Credit Union
- Synovus Bank
- Capital City Bank
- U.S. Bank
- Florida A&M University Small Business Development Center
- DOMI Station
- Jim Moran College of Entrepreneurship
- Apalachee Regional Planning Council
- Community Redevelopment Agency
- Innovation Park
- Florida Chamber of Commerce

#### **Youth/Adult Employment Stakeholder Map: Organizations**

- CareerSource
- Florida State University
- Florida A&M University
- Tallahassee State College
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People ACT-SO Achievement Program
- 211 Big Bend
- ECHO
- United Way
- Whole Child Leon

#### **Financial Empowerment Stakeholder Map: Organizations**

- Bank On Tallahassee Coalition
- Tallahassee Lenders Consortium
- Capital Area Community Action Agency
- ECHO
- Tallahassee Housing Authority
- Center for Corporate & Community Education
- Florida Bankers Association
- Legal Services North Florida
- Junior Achievement
- Tallahassee Builders Association
- Second Harvest
- Capital Health Plan
- Florida Blue
- HCA Florida Capital Hospital
- Tallahassee Memorial Hospital
- Bond Community Health Center
- Neighborhood Medical Center
- Capital Area Healthy Start
- United Partners of Human Services

## APPENDIX 3

### Implementation Timeline: Housing and Residential Security Solutions

#### Goal

Increase the inventory of safe and sanitary affordable housing for low-income individuals and families.

#### Potential Partners

- 2-1-1 Big Bend
- Legal Services of North Florida
- Tallahassee Lenders' Consortium
- Center for Heirs' Property Preservation

#### Strategies and Implementation Tasks

1. Support the housing rehabilitation and emergency repair programs to preserve affordable housing units.

Implementation Task	Description	Timing
Catalog Existing Programs	2-1-1 Big Bend maintains a database of existing and available programs, including the County's housing rehabilitation and emergency repair programs. In addition, human service agencies that receive County funding must coordinate with 2-1-1 Big Bend to ensure that program information is included in the database. This effort ensures that residents have easy access to up-to-date resources and assistance services.	Short-term
Enhance Outreach	Develop a targeted outreach campaign in coordination with the Trusted People Neighborhood Steering Committee to ensure that residents in underserved communities are aware of and can access these programs, including community meetings, flyer distribution at local schools, and social media campaigns.	Mid-term
Process Improvement	Review and streamline the application process for County programs to make them more accessible. This could include simplifying forms, offering application assistance, and reducing turnaround times for repairs.	Mid-term

## APPENDIX 3

### Implementation Timeline: Housing and Residential Security Solutions

2. Expand opportunities to provide educational workshops and legal assistance to alleviate heirs' property issues, support wealth building, and encourage home maintenance.

Implementation Task	Description	Timing
Partnership Development	Partner with organizations like Legal Services of North Florida and the Center for Heirs' Property Preservation to offer recurring workshops on heirs' property issues. Workshops could include legal information, opportunities to help families clear title issues, and resources for home maintenance.	Short-term
Resource Creation	Strategies identified in the City's Neighborhood First Plans, such as the development of toolkits for residents that includes information on legal resources, steps for clearing property titles, and best practices for home maintenance.	Mid-term
Community Engagement	Continue to host community forums to discuss heirs' property challenges and gather input on additional support needs.	Long-term

3. Support initiatives to increase affordable homeownership opportunities.

Implementation Task	Description	Timing
Process Development	Continue to engage the Affordable Housing Advisory Committee and other stakeholders to evaluate and enhance Leon County's Homeownership Development Program and other housing initiatives.	Short-term
Program Expansion	Explore opportunities to develop additional programs aimed at increasing affordable homeownership opportunities, including leveraging funding through the HUD PRO Housing grant.	Mid-term
Capacity Building	Work with the Tallahassee Lenders' Consortium and other partners to expand access to affordable mortgages and financial education programs.	Long-term

## APPENDIX 3

### Implementation Timeline: Social Wellness and Support Services

#### **Goal**

Expand the social safety net by increasing access to resources and services to enhance the quality of life of citizens.

#### **Potential Partners**

- 2-1-1 Big Bend
- Children's Services Council of Leon County
- Health and Human Service Providers
- United Way of the Big Bend

#### **Strategies and Implementation Tasks**

1. Enhance partnership with the 2-1-1 Big Bend Lyft Program to expand transportation access, including for those in Leon County's rural areas.

Implementation Task	Description	Timing
Coordination	Continue to meet with 2-1-1 Big Bend to discuss the current scope of the Lyft program and identify potential areas for expansion, particularly in rural areas where transportation options are limited.	Short-term
Needs Assessment	Collaborate with local community leaders, residents, and community organizations in rural areas to understand specific transportation needs.	Mid-term
Program Expansion	Provide dedicated funding to 2-1-1 Big Bend for the Lyft Program to expand service provision through increased trips. Monitor the number of trips, including in unincorporated Leon County, to determine how residents are engaging with the program, including the services they are accessing through Lyft rides.	Long-term

## APPENDIX 3

### Implementation Timeline: Housing and Residential Security Solutions

2. Strategically promote existing programs, such as the Leon County Primary Healthcare Program and enrollment information, to reach the most vulnerable, including those impacted by the digital divide.

Implementation Task	Description	Timing
Community Engagement	Organize in-person outreach events in communities heavily impacted by the digital divide. This could include participation in community meetings and events, door-to-door outreach through the Trusted People Neighborhood Steering Committee, and partnerships with local organizations to distribute information.	Mid-term

3. Collaborate with healthcare and mental health providers, including Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), to address community needs and provide access to primary, mental, and dental care, ensuring comprehensive health and human services are available.

Implementation Task	Description	Timing
Regular Meetings	Participate in quarterly meetings with key healthcare and mental health providers to discuss ongoing needs, challenges, and opportunities for collaboration based on the latest Community Health Assessments created by Capital Area Healthy Start, Tallahassee Memorial Healthcare, and the Department of Health.	Short-term
Catalog Existing Programs	2-1-1 Big Bend maintains a database of existing and available programs, including the County's health and human services programs. In addition, health and human service agencies that receive County funding must coordinate with 2-1-1 Big Bend to ensure that program information is included in the database. This effort ensures that residents have easy access to up-to-date resources and assistance services.	Mid-term

## APPENDIX 3

### Implementation Timeline: Housing and Residential Security Solutions

4. Develop a Community Information Exchange platform in partnership with 2-1-1 Big Bend, the City of Tallahassee, United Way of the Big Bend, the Children's Services Council of Leon County, and other key stakeholders.

Implementation Task	Description	Timing
Platform Development	Convene a working group of program specialists, community organizations, and end-users to explore the feasibility of a Community Information Exchange platform. This group will assess the functionality of a central hub, how it can best serve the community, and the challenges of maintaining and updating the exchange. The goal is to ensure the platform, if implemented, is practical, user-friendly, and accessible across various devices, while also addressing the complexities of keeping the information current and relevant.	Short-term
Data Integration	Partner with 2-1-1 Big Bend to integrate data from other organizations into the platform, including client data, eligibility criteria, and program availability.	Mid-term
Promotion and Training	Partner with 2-1-1 Big Bend to promote the platform, including training sessions for community organizations and residents on how to use the platform effectively.	Long-term

## APPENDIX 3

### Implementation Timeline: Financial Education and Management Resources

#### Goal

Expand access to safe and affordable financial services for citizens and businesses to promote financial stability and resources and enhance intergenerational wealth.

#### Potential Partners

- Children's Services Council of Leon County
- FAMU Federal Credit Union Smart Steps Program
- Florida A&M University Small Business Development Center
- Greater Tallahassee Chamber of Commerce

#### Strategies and Implementation Tasks

1. Support the integration of financial education and banking access within existing youth employment programs.

Implementation Task	Description	Timing
Program Analysis	Evaluate current financial education and banking access within County youth employment programs, including Summer Youth and Junior Apprenticeship.	Short-term
Integration of Financial Education and Banking Access	In partnership with Bank On Tallahassee, collaborate with local banks, credit unions, and financial education nonprofits to design financial education modules that can be integrated into County youth employment programs. Additionally, build in opportunities for safe banking access, such as certified account openings, to ensure youth not only gain financial knowledge but also have access to secure, affordable banking services to support their financial stability and growth.	Mid-term
Community Collaboration	Collaborate with other providers of youth employment programs, including the City of Tallahassee and the Children's Services Council of Leon County, to share information about outcomes and best practices to enhance each program.	Long-term

2. Explore the development of a Financial Empowerment Center.

Implementation Task	Description	Timing
Initial Planning Phase	Participate in Phase 1 of the Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund Financial Empowerment Center Academy, led by the Capital City Chamber of Commerce, to explore the feasibility of opening a financial empowerment center in Leon County.	Short-term

## APPENDIX 3

### Implementation Timeline: Financial Education and Management Resources

3. Support the Bank On Tallahassee initiative via collaboration, resource support, and integration into existing programs to increase access to certified checking and transaction accounts by building programmatic partnerships between local financial institutions and community-serving programs, and encourage saving, investing, and financial counseling to further enhance financial stability for residents.

Implementation Task	Description	Timing
Partnership Coordination	Through Bank On Tallahassee, coordinate community discussions with key partners, including libraries, community centers, and financial institutions, to discuss and plan the integration of banking access and financial education into existing programs and services.	Mid-term
Program Implementation	In partnership with Bank On Tallahassee, collaborate with local banks, credit unions, and financial education nonprofits to design financial education modules that can be integrated into County youth employment programs. Additionally, build in opportunities for safe banking access, such as certified account openings, to ensure youth not only gain financial knowledge but also have access to secure, affordable banking services to support their financial stability and growth.	Long-term
Collaborative Meetings	Meet regularly with the Bank On Tallahassee team to integrate their services into existing County programs. This includes exploring ways to incorporate Bank On materials into youth employment programs, financial literacy workshops, and community events. Bank On Tallahassee, having participated in the Bank On Academy, is also a recipient of the Capacity Grant from the Cities for Financial Empowerment (CFE) Fund, which supports the coalition's leadership and expansion efforts.	Ongoing
Resource Allocation	County staff supports the ongoing expansion of Bank On Tallahassee's outreach, particularly in underserved communities. The CFE Fund's Capacity Grant is currently providing critical capacity-building support, helping to increase the number of certified accounts and developing new programmatic integrations. County support will focus on amplifying these efforts through promotion and technical support.	Ongoing

## APPENDIX 3

### Implementation Timeline: Financial Education and Management Resources

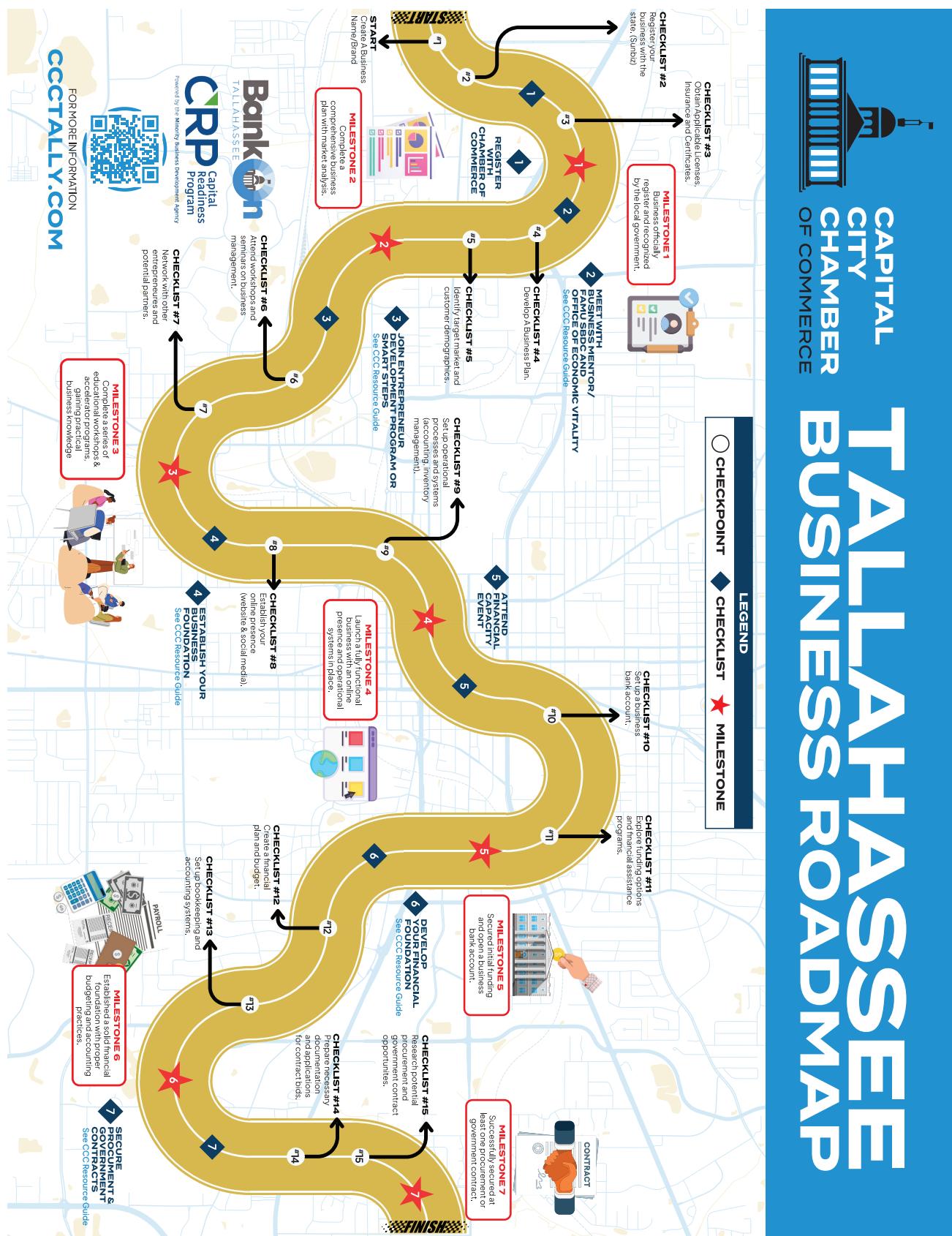
Implementation Task	Description	Timing
Awareness Campaign	A targeted awareness campaign, led by the Capital City Chamber of Commerce, will inform residents, especially those in areas with high rates of unbanked or underbanked individuals, about the benefits of the Bank On initiative. This campaign will complement the ongoing efforts funded by the CFE Capacity Grant, ensuring that more residents gain access to safe and affordable banking options.	Ongoing

4. Support the Capital City Chamber of Commerce via the existing partnership with the Tallahassee-Leon County Office of Economic Vitality in creating and distributing a comprehensive small business development pipeline to increase access to resources and capital for businesses, including the assessment of current resources and barriers.

Implementation Task	Description	Timing
Resource Assessment	Conduct a thorough assessment of the current resources available to small businesses in Leon County, including financial services, mentorship opportunities, and educational programs.	Short-term
Capital Readiness Program	Capital City Chamber of Commerce in partnership with the Tallahassee-Leon County Office of Economic Vitality and Florida A&M University Small Business Development Center to design and promote a small business development pipeline that addresses these barriers and guides businesses through the stages of growth, from startup to expansion.	Mid-term
Pilot Initiative	The Capital City Chamber of Commerce will explore the launch of a pilot program that focuses on one key area of the pipeline, such as access to capital or mentorship.	Long-term
Outreach and Engagement	Continue the comprehensive outreach strategy to connect small businesses with the resources available through the pipeline.	Ongoing
Tracking and Evaluation	Continue to monitor how many small businesses are connected to resources via the pipeline.	Ongoing

## APPENDIX 4

### Tallahassee Business Roadmap



## FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT SUMMIT - SEPTEMBER 20, 2023





## OUR VALUE PROPOSITION

### **What You Get as a Taxpayer and a Stakeholder in our Community**

Leon County Government leverages partnerships, embraces efficiency and innovation, and demands performance to the benefit of our taxpayers. We actively engage our citizens, not only as taxpayers, but as stakeholders and co-creators of our community – providing meaningful opportunities to capitalize on their talents in making important decisions and shaping our community for future generations.

## LEON COUNTY WANTS TO KNOW HOW WE CAN SERVE YOU

To learn more about Leon County's health and human services programs, call **(850) 606-1900** or visit [LeonCountyFL.gov/HSCP](http://LeonCountyFL.gov/HSCP)

To serve on a Citizen Committee, call **(850) 606-5300** or visit [LeonCountyFL.gov/Committees](http://LeonCountyFL.gov/Committees)

To provide feedback or make a service request, call **(850) 606-5300** or visit [LeonCountyFL.gov/CitizensConnect](http://LeonCountyFL.gov/CitizensConnect)



## LEON COUNTY GOVERNMENT

People Focused. Performance Driven.

### Office of Human Services & Community Partnerships

615 East Paul Russell Road | Tallahassee, FL 32301



**LEON COUNTY RESOLUTION NO. 24- 11**

A RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY  
COMMISSIONERS OF LEON COUNTY, FLORIDA, TO  
ACKNOWLEDGE AND APOLOGIZE FOR THE HISTORY OF  
SLAVERY AND RACISM IN LEON COUNTY; AND  
PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

## RECITALS

WHEREAS, the system of slavery and the visceral racism against persons of African descent was entrenched in the Nation's social fabric; and

WHEREAS, slavery was not officially abolished until the passage of the 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution in 1865 after the end of the Civil War; and

WHEREAS, the system of racial segregation known as "Jim Crow," which arose in certain parts of the Nation following the Civil War, was a direct result of the racism against persons of African descent engendered by slavery; and

WHEREAS, at Florida's Constitutional Convention of 1885, the Florida Legislature mandated racial segregation in schools and prohibited interracial marriages which marked the beginning of segregation under Jim Crow in Florida and Leon County; and

WHEREAS, there were at least four documented lynchings in Leon County between 1897 and 1937 – Pierce Taylor, Mick Morris, Ernest Ponder, and Richard Hawkins; and

WHEREAS, a historical marker has been placed under an oak tree at Cascades Park, near the site of the County's old jail, to memorialize the four victims of racially motivated violence; and

WHEREAS, as a result of segregation and limited opportunities afforded to African Americans under Jim Crow, Leon County's African American community established the Smokey Hollow neighborhood, a community of African American families, social organizations, cultural institutions, and businesses in the 1890s; and

WHEREAS, in the 1960s the Smokey Hollow neighborhood was demolished and its residents displaced to make way for public infrastructure; and

WHEREAS, in 2015 the Blueprint Intergovernmental Agency constructed the Smokey Hollow commemorative site to tell the story of the Smokey Hollow community; and

WHEREAS, Florida's 1885 Constitution remained in effect until 1968, which enabled the furtherance of separate and unequal societies for whites and African Americans; and

WHEREAS, in 1956, Reverend Dr. Charles Kenzie Steele led the community in organizing the Tallahassee bus boycott, the second major bus boycott in the United States; and

WHEREAS, in the 1960s, members of Leon County's African American community organized lunch counter sit-ins at McCrory's and Woolworth's; and

1            WHEREAS, these events have been memorialized through the Tallahassee-Leon County Civil  
2 Rights Heritage Walk, a sidewalk memorial constructed in 2013 which tells the story of peaceful  
3 protests and demonstrations that sought desegregation and equality in our community; and  
4

5            WHEREAS, the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 marked a major milestone in the Civil  
6 Rights Movement in America; and  
7

8            WHEREAS, nearly 100 years after emancipation from slavery, Congress approved the Civil  
9 Rights Act of 1964 which banned discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, and national  
10 origin.  
11

12            BE IT RESOLVED BY THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF LEON  
13 COUNTY, FLORIDA, that:

14            **Section 1. Leon County apologizes for the enslavement and segregation of African Americans.**

15            The Board acknowledges the fundamental injustice, cruelty, brutality, and inhumanity of  
16 slavery and Jim Crow laws.  
17

18            The Board apologizes to African Americans, on behalf of the people of Leon County for the  
19 wrongs committed against them and their ancestors who suffered under slavery and Jim Crow laws.  
20

21            The Board expresses its recommitment to the principle that all people are created equal and  
22 endowed with inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.  
23

24            The Board expresses its commitment to recognize the misdeeds committed against African  
25 Americans under slavery and Jim Crow, and to work toward eliminating racial prejudices, injustices,  
and discrimination from our society.  
26

27            The Board celebrates the strides that our community has made toward racial equality, including  
28 the free and fair elections of Leon County Commissioners, Constitutional Officers, and State  
Delegation Members who represent the diverse population of the electorate.  
29

30            Leon County Government is honored to be the home of Florida A&M University, the top public  
31 Historically Black College and University in the country, for its continued excellence in cultivating  
Black scholars and leaders within our community.  
32

33            Leon County Government continues to lead the charge against racial inequality in our words,  
34 deeds, and initiatives, like facilitating crucial community dialogue through the Created Equal program,  
35 an annual citizen engagement event which connects residents of diverse backgrounds, education, and  
age to encourage frank conversations on race and racial inequity.  
36



# **LEON COUNTY CITIZEN CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE**

## **NOTES FOR AGENDA ITEM #3**

# Citizen Charter Review Committee

## Agenda Item #3

January 22, 2026

**To:** 2025-2026 Leon County Citizen Charter Review Committee

**From:** Vincent S. Long, County Administrator

**Title:** Community Value of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

<b>Review and Approval:</b>	Vincent S. Long, County Administrator
<b>Department / Division Review:</b>	Ken Morris, Assistant County Administrator Shington Lamy, Assistant County Administrator
<b>Lead Staff / Project Team:</b>	Abigail Thomas, Director, Office of Human Services and Community Partnerships

### Summary:

At its January 8, 2026 meeting, the Citizen Charter Review Committee requested an agenda item to consider amending the Leon County Charter to adopt a community value statement in support of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

### Staff Recommendation:

Option #1: Accept the report on a community value statement in support of diversity, equity, and inclusion and take no further action.

## Report and Discussion

### **Background:**

At its January 8, 2026 meeting, the Citizen Charter Review Committee (Committee) requested an agenda item to consider amending the Leon County Charter to adopt a community value statement in support of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). As highlighted in the January 22, 2026 Committee item on poverty and inequity, the County has a long history of investing critical resources to improve the quality of life and spur economic prosperity in neighborhoods that have historically experienced poverty and inequities. These efforts have been consistent with state and federal requirements, and do not jeopardize the County's ability to secure critical state and federal funding.

As detailed in the Analysis section, state and federal rules and legislation seek to prohibit the adoption and implementation of policies, programs, and services that address historic racial disenfranchisement, diversity, equity, and inclusion. While a community value statement expresses a shared belief and is generally considered non-binding, a charter provision supporting DEI may jeopardize the County's future state and federal funding opportunities. Therefore, it is recommended that the Committee not consider the adoption of a community value statement in the County Charter specifically in support of DEI.

### **Analysis:**

The Leon County Charter provides for the structure, organization, and authority of County government. Though the County Charter does not include specific value statements or policy priorities, Section 1 of the Charter provides a Preamble which affirms the broad values and beliefs of County residents as follows:

*We, the citizens of Leon County, Florida, united in the belief that **governmental decisions affecting local interests should be made locally**, rather than by the State, and that **County government should be reflective of the people of the County and should serve them in achieving a more responsive and efficient form of government** and in order to **empower the people of this County to make changes in their own government**, do ordain and establish this Home Rule Charter for Leon County, Florida. [emphasis added]*

The Preamble captures broad community values which emphasize the importance of home rule and governmental decisions being made at the local level as well as the role of residents in shaping their local government. The Preamble is intentionally broad so that the County can adapt and respond to new challenges as determined by the elected County Commission. Key provisions of the Preamble include:

- *County government should be reflective of the people:* This provision addresses representative government which, by definition, must be diverse and inclusive in order to reflect our community.
- *Should serve them in achieving a more responsive and efficient form of government:* This provision speaks to public service, fairness and equity in serving the community at large, and rising to the challenges of the day which requires flexibility.

- *Empower the people of this County to make changes in their own government:* This provision addresses the role of citizens to impose changes to the structure of their government including limiting or expanding the County's authority relative to its citizens and municipal governments.

While the Committee may wish to consider recommending an amendment to the Charter to incorporate a community value statement in support of DEI, ongoing efforts at the state and federal levels threaten to reduce funding to the County for dedicated programs and initiatives in support of DEI. Acknowledging that poverty and inequity continue to exist in our community, the Committee may wish to reinforce specific policy recommendations encouraging Board action to continue its efforts to reduce poverty in the community. A recommendation by the Committee would be included as part of its report for Board consideration.

#### Federal and State Efforts to Prohibit Policies and Investment Based on Historic Discrimination

Recent and ongoing state and federal actions are focused on prohibiting the adoption and implementation of policies, programs, and services that seek to address historic racial disenfranchisement or DEI. The definition of DEI in Presidential Executive Orders and legislation have generally included employment, policies, programs, and services that “promote or provide preferential treatment or special benefits to a person or group based on race, color, sex, ethnicity, gender identity, or sexual orientation.”

At the state level, Florida passed the Individual Freedom Act in 2022 to restrict training related to systemic racism and identity in schools and workplaces. In addition, several bills have been filed for the 2026 Legislative Session that would prohibit local governments from adopting or funding DEI-related policies and programs. The proposed legislation also seeks to void any current DEI policies and programs that are currently in place, remove elected officials from office that violate the prohibition, and authorize residents to sue local governments that adopt, implement and/or fund DEI-related policies and programs.

At the federal level, Executive Order 14173 issued on January 21, 2025, rescinded long-standing federal contractor requirements related to race and gender-based employment and contracting practices. Additionally, several federal departments have begun including language in grant contracts that require recipients to certify that they do not “operate any programs that advance or promote DEI, DEIA (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility), or discriminatory equity ideology”. As a result of these ongoing state and federal actions, many local governments have been proactive in reducing or eliminating policies, programs, and services that explicitly or implicitly promote DEI. For example, in June 2025, the City of Orlando suspended its Minority, Women Business Enterprise program effective immediately in order to avoid the freeze or claw back of federal grant funds.

In December 2025, the County was awarded a \$16.8 million grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation (US DOT) for safety improvements on North Monroe Street. The County is currently coordinating with US DOT on the development of a contract agreement which may impose similar provisions that prohibit DEI-related policies, programs, and services. Therefore, the adoption of the proposed charter amendment is not recommended as it could immediately jeopardize federal funding recently awarded to the County.

*Alternative Option for the Charter Review Committee*

The County has been successful in addressing poverty and inequities in accordance with state and federal laws based on empirical data and community needs. The County's human services programs are not specific to, or solely intended for, historically disenfranchised populations. However, the programs often support the quality of life and spur economic prosperity for residents in areas generally considered historically disenfranchised.

The Leon County Charter provides for the structure, organization, and authority of County government. Though the County Charter does not include specific programs or provisions related to DEI, Section 1 of the Charter provides a Preamble which affirms the broad values and beliefs of County residents which address fairness, diversity, equity, and inclusion. Acknowledging that poverty and inequity continue to exist in our community, the Committee may wish to provide a policy recommendation to the Board encouraging the continuation of the County's long-standing commitment to advancing the quality of life for all residents in the community. The recommendation would be included as part of the Committee's report for Board consideration.

**Options:**

1. Accept the status on a community value statement in support of diversity, equity, and inclusion and take no further action.
2. Direct staff to prepare a policy recommendation to the Board encouraging the continuation of the County's long-standing commitment to advancing quality of life for all residents in the community.
3. Direct staff to draft a proposed charter amendment to adopt a community value statement in support of diversity, equity, and inclusion.
4. Committee direction.

**Recommendation:**

Option #1