

Citizen Charter Review Committee
February 19, 2026
11:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.
Leon County Main Library Programming Room

AGENDA

Call to Order and Opening

Mary Ann Lindley,
Chair

Consent

- Approval of February 5, 2026 Meeting Minutes
- Receipt & File of Written Public Comments

Public Comment

General Business

- **Agenda Item #1:** Consideration of Language Affirming Leon County’s Commitment to Healthcare in the Leon County Charter
- **Agenda Item #2:** Proposed Charter Amendment on Food Insecurity
- **Agenda Item #3:** Proposed Charter Amendment on Persistent Disparities Resulting from Historic Public Policies

Next Steps

- **Tuesday, March 10, 2026 BOCC Meeting:** Status Report on CCRC’s Recommendations
- **June/July 2026:** CCRC’s Three (3) Tentative Public Hearing on Proposed Amendments (Tuesday, June 30, 2026; Thursday, July 16, 2026; and Thursday, July 30, 2026)
- **Monday, August 17, 2026:** BOCC Tentative Public Hearing on CCRC’s Proposed Amendments with Presentation of CCRC Final Report
- **Tuesday, November 3, 2026:** 2026 General Election

**LEON COUNTY CITIZEN CHARTER REVIEW
COMMITTEE**

**APPROVAL OF FEBRUARY 5, 2026 MEETING
MINUTES**

Citizen Charter Review Committee
February 5, 2026
11:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.*
Leon County Main Library
Programming Room

The Leon County 2025-2026 Citizen Charter Review Committee (CCRC) met on February 5, 2026, at 11:30 a.m. in the Leon County Main Library with Committee members Mary Ann Lindley, Chauncy Haynes, Linda Bond Edwards, Liz Ellis, Anita Favors, Max Herrle, Darryl Jones, Howard Kessler, Henry Lewis, III, Heidi Otway, Sean Pittman, Ryan Ray, Shamarial Roberson, Temple Robinson, William Smith, Bruce Strouble, Jr., Jarrett Terry and Katrina Tuggerson 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, Slaton Murray and Barry Wilcox.

Call to Order and Opening Mary Ann Lindley, Chair

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

Proposed Extension of Final Meetings until 2:30 p.m.*

Chair Lindley requested Committee consideration of extending the scheduled end time for the February 5th and 19th meetings until 2:30 p.m., to ensure adequate time for deliberations and completion of Committee business.

Max Herrle moved, seconded by Anita Favors, to extend the scheduled end time for the February 5th and 19th meetings until 2:30 p.m.

The motion carried 12 – 0 with Committee Members Joey Davis, Darryl Jones, Howard Kessler, Slaton Murray, Heidi Otway, Sean Pittman, Shamarial Roberson, Katrina Tuggerson and Barry Wilcox not present.

- *Sean Pittman arrived at this juncture of the meeting.*

Consent:

Max Herrle moved, seconded by Bruce Strouble, Jr., to approve the consent agenda as presented.

The motion carried 13 – 0 with Committee Members Joey Davis, Darryl Jones, Howard Kessler, Slaton Murray, Heidi Otway, Shamarial Roberson, Katrina Tuggerson and Barry Wilcox not present.

Approval of January 22, 2026 Meeting Minutes

Receipt & File of Written Public Comments

- *Howard Kessler arrived at this juncture of the meeting.*

Public Comment:

- Tiffany Hill, 1401 Lola Drive, spoke in support of Option 2 on Agenda Item #4, stating housing issues are regional and affect workforce stability and community health. She

supported the option as a balanced approach that creates a permanent fund while preserving the Board of County Commissioners' budget flexibility and encouraging City-County collaboration.

- Peter Butscene, 2358 Carefree Ct., spoke in favor of creating an independent Office of Inspector General, emphasizing it as a preventative measure to deter future corruption and strengthen public trust despite no current scandals. He stated existing ethics safeguards are weak, and the cost of the office would be minimal compared to the potential consequences of misconduct.
- Ernie Paine, 2006 E. Indianhead Dr., supported establishing an Office of Inspector General as a proactive step to prevent future problems and demonstrate the County's commitment to transparent and ethical government. He noted the Charter sets priorities rather than budgets and argued independent oversight protects economic reputation and public confidence.
- Ben Wilcox, 1719 Old Fort Dr., spoke in support of placing a charter amendment establishing an independent Inspector General before voters, stating independence is essential for investigating fraud, waste, and abuse. He expressed confidence the measure would receive public approval and stated anti-corruption reforms should be decided by the community.
- *Darryl Jones, Katrina Tuggerson, Heidi Otway and Shamarial Roberson arrived at this juncture of the meeting.*

General Business:

Agenda Item #1: Consideration to Establish an Office of Inspector General in the Leon County Charter

Nicki Hatch, Assistant to the County Administrator for Legislative and Strategic Initiatives, introduced the item and summarized that an Office of Inspector General (OIG) generally exists to detect, investigate, and prevent fraud, waste, abuse, mismanagement, and misconduct, and reviewed how independent OIGs are structured in four Florida charter counties (Miami-Dade, Broward, Jacksonville-Duval, and Palm Beach), including typical functions such as complaint investigation, auditing, and contract oversight. She noted that most complaints in peer OIGs result in no action or referral elsewhere and that these offices are not small, with staffing and budgets varying significantly by jurisdiction.

County Attorney Chasity O'Steen provided clarification on Leon County's ethics enforcement framework, distinguishing state-level complaints filed under Chapter 112 with the Florida Commission on Ethics from complaints made under the County's Code of Ethics. She explained that the County Code includes provisions addressing investigations and prosecution of alleged violations and referenced the ordinance-based penalty structure applicable to violations of the standards of conduct.

William Smith requested examples of what would constitute financial mishandling.

County Attorney O'Steen explained that allegations of financial impropriety may be reported to the Clerk of Court, which maintains an independent office, or submitted through the County's Fraud and Abuse Hotline, in which case, the Human Resources Department would lead the investigation.

Henry Lewis, III, inquired about the total number of cases that have come before the County.

County Attorney O'Steen responded that there had been one such case, which was resolved through the County's waste, fraud, and abuse process.

Max Herrle referenced the City's process regarding petty cash.

County Administrator Vincent Long explained that the County undergoes an independent audit conducted by the Clerk's Office, which focuses on internal controls. He noted that the audit findings are presented to the Board along with a corrective action plan.

Sean Pittman stated that he was interested in the fiscal implications of the proposal and noted that, based on what he had observed, the associated costs could be significant.

Mrs. Hatch referenced the Office of the Inspector General in Duval County, noting that their Charter requires minimum funding of \$400,000; however, their recent adopted budget was \$1.5 million.

Linda Bond Edwards inquired about the County's responsibility to consider fiscal impacts and whether a cost analysis would be included as part of the ballot process.

County Attorney O'Steen addressed the use of departmental language regarding fiscal impacts and explained that it had been determined that fiscal impact information could not be included on the ballot.

Chair Lindley asked who would be responsible for hiring the Inspector General.

Mrs. Hatch stated that the matter would depend on the structure adopted and could require approval by the Board.

Darryl Jones commented on the current structure and safeguards already in place and explained the School Board's process as a point of reference.

Mrs. Hatch recalled that there are existing processes already in place, including the Fraud and Abuse Hotline administered by the Clerk's Office.

Shamarial Roberson inquired whether the Office of the Inspector General would consist of a single individual or include staff. She spoke on the importance of autonomy for the position and emphasized the integrity of the program.

Howard Kessler requested the Chair allow Ernie Paine to address questions from the Committee regarding the purpose and structure of his proposed Office of Inspector General. Chair Lindley concurred.

Ernie Paine stated that, while he understood the role of the Clerk's Office in addressing issues related to fraud and financial matters, he believed there should be a dedicated office where complaints could be submitted. He discussed the importance of having appropriate infrastructure in place to handle such matters.

County Attorney O'Steen explained that the County does not have authority over the Clerk, noting that both the County and the Clerk retain a statutory auditor. She referenced corrective updates and findings that are addressed through the Clerk's audit process. She shared an update that the audit will be coming back to the Board at the next BOCC Meeting scheduled for Tuesday, February 10.

Howard Kessler moved, seconded by Bruce Strouble, Jr., to direct staff to prepare a proposed charter amendment to establish an Office of Inspector General with funding determined by County Government.

The motion failed 4 – 14 with Chair Mary Ann Lindley, Chauncy Haynes, Linda Bond Edwards, Liz Ellis, Anita Favors, Darryl Jones, Henry Lewis, III, Heidi Otway, Sean Pittman, Shamarial Roberson, Temple Robinson, William Smith, Jarrett Terry and Katrina Tuggerson in opposition. Committee Members Joey Davis, Slaton Murray and Barry Wilcox were not present.

Darryl Jones called the question since there was confusion on what the previous vote was for.

Darryl Jones moved, seconded by Sean Pittman, to call the question.

The motion carried 18 – 0 with Committee Members Joey Davis, Slaton Murray and Barry Wilcox not present.

Howard Kessler moved, seconded by Bruce Strouble, Jr., to direct staff to prepare a proposed charter amendment to establish an Office of Inspector General with funding determined by County Government.

The motion failed 4 – 14 with Chair Mary Ann Lindley, Chauncy Haynes, Linda Bond Edwards, Liz Ellis, Anita Favors, Darryl Jones, Henry Lewis, III, Heidi Otway, Sean Pittman, Shamarial Roberson, Temple Robinson, William Smith, Jarrett Terry and Katrina Tuggerson in opposition. Committee Members Joey Davis, Slaton Murray and Barry Wilcox were not present.

Darryl Jones moved, seconded by William Smith, to approve Option #1: Accept this report and table this issue.

The motion carried 16 – 2 with Committee Members Max Herrle and Ryan Ray in opposition. Committee Members Joey Davis, Slaton Murray and Barry Wilcox were not present.

Agenda Item #2: Consideration of a Policy Recommendation on Unified Street Renaming

Mrs. Hatch introduced the item and explained that, at the Committee's request, staff prepared a draft policy recommendation encouraging the County and the City to work together to align street renaming policies and procedures in order to prevent public safety and emergency service issues. She noted that, if approved, the recommendation would be included in the Committee's status report to the Board in March and in the Committee's final report later this summer.

Vice Chairman Haynes moved, seconded by Temple Robinson, to approve Option #1: Approve the draft policy recommendation encouraging unified street renaming policies and procedures.

The motion carried 18 – 0 with Committee Members Joey Davis, Slaton Murray and Barry Wilcox not present.

Agenda Item #3: Consideration of Revision to the Preamble in the Leon County Charter

Mrs. Hatch introduced the item and explained that, at the Committee's request, staff prepared proposed charter amendment language revising the Preamble of the Leon County Charter to reflect the shared humanity among County residents. She noted that a simple majority vote would be required to recommend the amendment to the Board of County Commissioners and, if approved, the Board would consider whether to advance it to a public hearing later this summer.

Darryl Jones moved, seconded by Vice Chairman Haynes, to approve Option #1: Approve the proposed charter amendment for recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners, revising the Preamble to reflect the esteemed humanity among residents of Leon County.

The motion carried 18 – 0 with Committee Members Joey Davis, Slaton Murray and Barry Wilcox not present.

Agenda Item #4: Consideration to Establish an Affordable Housing Trust Fund in the Leon County Charter

Assistant County Administrator Shington Lamy introduced this item. As requested by the Committee, this item provides a proposed amendment to the Leon County Charter with ballot language to establish an affordable housing trust fund in the Charter.

Vice Chairman Chauncy Haynes moved, seconded by Liz Ellis, to approve Option #1: Approve a policy recommendation encouraging the Board to continue the County's longstanding commitment to increasing and preserving the stock of affordable housing in the community.

The motion was not voted on.

Bruce Strouble, Jr., commented on what he described as the affordable housing crisis within the County and emphasized the importance of protecting residents through structural and sustainable measures.

Max Herrle discussed elements he believed were not fully reflected in the County's proposed language and raised concerns regarding governance and structural oversight provisions.

Henry Lewis, III, inquired whether there were any affordable housing funds currently available that the County was not drawing down.

Mr. Lamy responded that staff continuously pursues available funding opportunities, including programs through the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), and confirmed that the County actively seeks and utilizes available funding sources.

County Attorney O'Steen addressed the Committee regarding potential modifications to the existing Trust Fund framework. She emphasized the importance of drafting language that would codify the fund while preserving sufficient flexibility for the Board of County Commissioners to modify or adjust the fund structure in the future as circumstances evolve.

Bruce Strouble, Jr., made a substitute motion, seconded by Max Herrle, to approve Option #2 as amended: Approve the proposed charter amendment for recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners to ~~establish~~ codify the Affordable Housing Trust Fund in the Leon County Charter.

The motion carried 12 – 6 with Vice Chairman Chauncy Haynes, Linda Bond Edwards, Liz Ellis, Darryl Jones, Howard Kessler and William Smith in opposition. Committee Members Joey Davis, Slaton Murray and Barry Wilcox were not present.

Adjournment:

Chair Lindley adjourned the meeting at 2:04 p.m.

ATTEST:

Mary Ann Lindley, Chair
Leon County Citizen Charter Review Committee

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)

From: Jewel Brown <jahsunjewels.llc@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, February 18, 2026 9:30 AM
To: Charter Review Process <CCRC@leoncountyfl.gov>
Subject: CCRC Public Comment – Support for Option 2 Charter Amendment

Good afternoon Members of the Citizen Charter Review Committee,

Please accept this written public comment for the record.

My name is Jewel D. Brown, and I live at 950 Edge Hill Circle, Apartment 124, Tallahassee, Florida 32303, in Frenchtown, Leon County.

I'm writing as a mother, a small business owner, an instructor, and a board member of Tallahassee Food Network. I work in Griffin Heights and serve youth and families across multiple neighborhoods in this county.

I see food access challenges firsthand — not just as an advocate, but as someone who lives in the community and works directly with families navigating food insecurity. I have personally experienced food insecurity, and I also work daily with residents who are trying to stabilize their households while navigating inconsistent access to food resources.

Access looks very different depending on which side of town you live on. In some areas, families have predictable options. In others, people often don't know where food will be available or when. Hours shift. Distribution sites rotate. Information travels by word of mouth instead of through a reliable public system.

Emergency response is also too ad hoc. After storms or crises, families are left trying to figure out where to go first instead of relying on a clear, coordinated structure.

And while we hear about efforts happening, there is no single public scorecard that allows residents to see what is improving countywide and what is not. Without annual reporting and a clear framework, accountability depends on who happens to be in office at the time.

Food access is not a single-agency issue. It intersects with emergency management, health, housing stability, youth development, and economic mobility. That kind of cross-agency work requires a durable structure.

Option 2 creates that structure. It requires a countywide plan and annual public reporting, while preserving Commission control over program details and funding decisions through ordinances and the annual budget. It does not create a blank check. It creates a framework.

For those of us working directly in communities — connecting families to resources, identifying gaps, and coordinating with partners — having a Charter-level coordination point would reduce fragmentation and strengthen long-term reliability.

This is about accountability and stability, not about creating a new program list.

I respectfully urge the Committee to support Option 2 and advance the drafted Charter language for recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jewel D. Brown



Jewel Brown
Graphic Designer
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Save contact

From: Jewel Brown <jahsunjewels.llc@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, February 18, 2026 9:24 AM
To: Charter Review Process <CCRC@leoncountyfl.gov>
Subject: Public Comment – Support for Restoring Communities Amendment

Good afternoon Members of the Citizen Charter Review Committee,

Please accept this written public comment for the record.

My name is Jewel D. Brown, and I live at 950 Edge Hill Circle, Apartment 124, Tallahassee, Florida 32303, in Frenchtown, Leon County.

I'm writing because public policy decisions don't just affect the present — they shape communities for generations. And when those effects last across generations, governance should respond in a long-term, structured way.

In Leon County, segregation-era public policies influenced where people lived and where public investment flowed. Neighborhoods such as Frenchtown, Bond, Griffin Heights, Providence, and South City were shaped by zoning, infrastructure placement, school assignments, and access to services. Today, those same areas still reflect higher poverty rates, lower homeownership, and disparities in health outcomes. Those patterns didn't happen randomly. They were shaped by policy decisions.

The Restoring Communities Amendment does not mandate spending, create quotas, or override state law. It simply authorizes the County to assess and consider documented historic impacts.

Advancing this amendment does not create programs or allocate funds. It allows draft language to be evaluated and ensures that any future ordinance would still comply with state and federal law.

What this amendment does is create a framework — one that allows findings from audits to be integrated into long-term planning and capital improvement strategies. That strengthens transparency and continuity in governance.

Charter language exists to protect responsibilities beyond election cycles. If impacts were created structurally, then the authority to examine and address them belongs structurally as well.

I respectfully encourage you to recommend advancing the Restoring Communities Amendment for inclusion in the Charter.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jewel D. Brown



Jewel Brown

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**LEON COUNTY CITIZEN CHARTER REVIEW
COMMITTEE**

NOTES FOR AGENDA ITEM #1

Citizen Charter Review Committee

Agenda Item #1

February 19, 2026

To: 2025-2026 Leon County Citizen Charter Review Committee

From: Vincent S. Long, County Administrator



Title: Consideration of Language Affirming Leon County's Commitment to Healthcare in the Leon County Charter

Review and Approval:	Vincent S. Long, County Administrator
Department / Division Review:	Ken Morris, Assistant County Administrator Shington Lamy, Assistant County Administrator
Lead Staff / Project Team:	Nicki Hatch, Assistant to the County Administrator for Legislative and Strategic Initiatives Abigail Thomas, Director, Human Services & Community Partnerships

Statement of Issue:

As requested by the Citizen Charter Review Committee, this item provides a proposed charter amendment revising the Preamble of the Leon County Charter with language that affirms Leon County's commitment to healthcare access.

Staff Recommendation:

Option #1: Approve the draft policy recommendation encouraging the continuation of Leon County's longstanding commitment to ensuring healthcare access for low-income residents and thereby supporting an equitable, safe, healthy, and vibrant community.

Report and Discussion

Background:

As requested by the Citizen Charter Review Committee (Committee), this item provides a proposed charter amendment revising the Preamble of the Leon County Charter (Charter) with language that affirms Leon County’s commitment to healthcare access.

On January 8, 2026, the Committee received an analysis of the County’s investment in healthcare for low-income residents (Attachment #1). This includes a total of \$7.7 million annually in programs and services for primary, dental, mental, specialty, and pharmaceutical healthcare. Subsequently, the Committee requested staff to draft a proposed charter amendment affirming Leon County’s commitment to primary healthcare access.

There are no County charters in Florida that include language regarding the provision of healthcare. County charters generally address large organizational issues focused on the authority, structure, and power of county government. As presented in this item and the previous Committee item, the Leon County Board of County Commissioners (Board) currently has the statutory authority and has been active in expanding healthcare services for uninsured and underinsured low-income residents in the community for over two decades. The Board has successfully taken action to expand healthcare access through its policy, programming, and budgetary decisions without amending the Charter.

However, as requested by the Committee, the following analysis proposes charter amendment language for the Committee’s consideration to revise the Preamble of the Charter to affirm Leon County’s commitment to healthcare access. The proposed charter amendment would incorporate existing language from the County’s Vision Statement already approved by the Board that highlights the importance of health for our community. As presented in the analysis, in addition to the Vision Statement, the proposed amendment includes the word “equitable” to reflect the County’s approach of utilizing empirical data and community engagement to achieve fair and impartial outcomes in the development and implementation of policies, programs, and services for residents. Consistent with the purpose of the Preamble, which is to uphold the broad values and beliefs of County residents, the proposed charter amendment does not delineate specific structures, authorities, policies, or provisions of services of the County government.

As previously stated, the Board currently has the authority and actively addresses access to healthcare through its policy, programming, and budgetary decisions without the need for a Charter change. Therefore, rather than a proposed charter amendment, an alternative option available to the Committee is to adopt a policy recommendation encouraging the Board to continue the County’s long-standing dedication to ensure low-income residents have access to high quality healthcare services in the community. Upon approval by the Committee, this policy recommendation would be included as part of the Committee’s report to the Board.

Analysis:

For more than 20 years, Leon County has ensured that low-income residents have access to high quality healthcare services. The County invests a total of \$7.7 million in healthcare annually in mandatory and discretionary programs and services. Pursuant to Florida Statutes, counties (both charter and non-charter) are mandated to contribute annually to the Florida Medicaid Program, County Health Departments (the 67 County Health Departments are operated by state employees under the Florida Department of Health), as well as the Baker and Marchman Act mental health and substance use disorder programs.

In addition to the programs mandated by the State, the County has historically dedicated additional local tax revenue and partnered with local healthcare stakeholders to invest and provide low-income residents with access to critical medical services through its Healthcare Program (CareNet). Annually, the County contracts with Bond Community Health Center, Neighborhood Medical Center, Apalachee Center, Capital Medical Society/We Care, and FAMU Pharmacy to provide low-income uninsured and underinsured residents access to primary care, dental, mental health, specialty care, and/or pharmaceutical services. The services funded by the County are provided at no cost to eligible low-income residents (18-years old or older at 100% or below the Federal Poverty Level).

Despite economic downturns, the County has never reduced funding to the CareNet program. In fact, the County regularly utilizes its investment in the CareNet program to secure additional state and federal funding. Over the past three years, the providers have leveraged County funding to secure \$7.5 million in state and federal funding to provide primary and mental health services to additional uninsured and underinsured low-income County residents. The County is among very few counties in Florida that dedicate additional local tax revenue to healthcare not required by state or federal law.

Additionally, the Board has reinforced and memorialized the County’s commitment to healthcare through a variety of policies including the County’s Vision Statement and Five-Year Strategic Plan. Leon County’s vision statement is an aspirational description of what the organization would like to achieve and accomplish in the future and also describes how Leon County, in an ideal state, should look in the future. The County’s Vision Statement is as follows:

“A community that is safe, **healthy**, and vibrant.”

Consistent with the Social Determinants of Health, the Vision Statement recognizes that a healthy community is a key component to the well-being, prosperity, and economic stability of every County resident. Furthermore, the County’s Five-Year Strategic Plan adopted by the Board incorporates four (4) strategic priorities (Economy, Environment, Quality of Life, and Governance) that are major areas of County responsibility and critical to the success of the community. The Quality of Life Priority states that the County’s responsibility is as follows:

“To be a provider of essential services which promote the well-being of our citizens and the livability of our community in our continuous efforts to make Leon County a place where people are **healthy**, safe, and connected to their community.”

The strategic priorities are supported by strategic initiatives which are program- or area-specific projects to serve and strengthen the community. This includes the CareNet program and other services that enhance the access and delivery of healthcare services to low-income residents. The Vision Statement and Strategic Plan is evaluated annually by the Board to ensure they reflect the ever-changing needs in the community. This has been demonstrated several times in recent years by the Board with enhancements to the CareNet program that included increased reimbursement rates to providers, expansion of services for diagnostic and ancillary services (i.e., labs, X-rays, etc.), and financial assistance for transportation cost for specialty care to address the changing healthcare needs of residents in the community. As a result, the Vision Statement and Five-Year Strategic Plan align with the County’s commitment to healthcare.

As previously mentioned, there are no County charters in Florida that include language regarding the provision of healthcare. County charters generally address large organizational issues focused on the authority, structure, and power of county government rather than specific policy issues. However, as requested by the Committee, the following provides proposed charter amendment language that would revise the Preamble of the County Charter to affirm the County’s commitment to a healthy community.

Proposed Charter Amendment

Section 1 of the Charter consists of the Preamble which 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 Board.

On February 5, 2026, the Committee approved a proposed charter amendment to the Preamble for Board consideration that expresses shared community values and reflects the esteemed humanity among residents of Leon County (Attachment #2). Aligned with the Committee’s recent action, a proposed charter amendment was developed to further revise the Preamble to include language that would reflect the Committee’s request of affirming the County’s commitment to primary healthcare access. The underlined language reflects the changes previously approved by the Committee. The proposed language in **bold** would be included in the revision of the Preamble to affirm the County’s commitment to healthcare access by incorporating existing language from the County’s Vision Statement that has already been adopted by the Board:

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, hereby affirm the esteemed humanity of all residents of Leon County. We recognize in every person a shared dignity, not granted by government, but inherent and deserving of consideration in our effort to create a community that is equitable, safe, healthy, and vibrant. ~~and~~ In order to empower the people of this County to make changes in their own government, we do ordain and establish this Home Rule Charter for Leon County, Florida.

In addition to capturing the existing language of the Vision Statement, the proposed charter amendment also includes the word “equitable” to reflect the County’s approach of utilizing empirical data and community engagement to achieve fair and impartial outcomes in the development and implementation of policies, programs, and services for residents. This recognizes the County’s commitment and ongoing efforts to provide high quality healthcare services to low-income residents in the community.

Should the Committee approve the language incorporating the Vision Statement into the Preamble, it would be combined with the esteemed humanity language for a single charter amendment since both seek to modify the Preamble. Additionally, the ballot title and ballot language previously approved by the Committee would be updated as reflected in Table #1 (in bold) to combine the esteemed humanity and healthcare languages since they both seek to revise the Preamble. The revised proposed ballot titles and ballot language would continue to meet the statutorily required word count limit. The ballot title is limited to 15 words, and the ballot language is limited to 75 words.

Table #1. Proposed Ballot Title and Ballot Language

Proposed Ballot Title
Affirmation of Human Dignity and Health of the Community
Proposed Ballot Language
Shall the Preamble of the Leon County Home Rule Charter be amended to affirm that the esteemed humanity and shared dignity of all residents is inherent and deserving of consideration in public affairs and affirm the County’s effort to create a community that is equitable, safe, healthy, and vibrant , while preserving the Charter’s existing framework for local self-governance and citizen empowerment?

A simple majority is needed to recommend a charter amendment to the Board. A status report on the Committee’s recommendation(s) will be provided to the Board at its regularly scheduled meeting on March 10, 2026. Upon approval by a simple majority of the Board, public hearings will be scheduled in June and July 2026, for the Committee to take public input and formally consider the proposed Charter amendments. The outcome of the public hearings will be reflected in the Committee’s final report to the Board in August 2026.

As previously stated, the Board currently has the authority and actively provides access to healthcare through its policy, programming, and budgetary decisions without the need for a Charter change. Additionally, there are no county charters in Florida that include language regarding the provision of healthcare. Therefore, rather than a proposed charter amendment, an alternative option available to the Committee is to adopt a policy recommendation encouraging the Board to continue the County’s long-standing commitment to ensure low-income residents have access to high quality healthcare services in the community. Table #2 below provides a draft policy recommendation for the Committee’s consideration.

Table #2. Draft Policy Recommendation to Board of County Commissioners

Draft Policy Recommendation
The Leon County Citizen Charter Review Committee encourages Leon County to continue its longstanding commitment to ensuring low-income residents have access to high quality healthcare thereby supporting an equitable, safe, healthy, and vibrant community.

The proposed policy recommendation would be included in the status report on the Committee’s actions to be presented to the Board in March 2026 as well as the Committee’s Final Report to be presented in August 2026.

Options:

1. Approve the draft policy recommendation encouraging the continuation of Leon County’s longstanding commitment to ensuring healthcare access for low-income residents and thereby supporting an equitable, safe, healthy, and vibrant community.
2. Approve the proposed charter amendment for recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners revising the Preamble to affirm the County’s commitment to healthcare access.
3. Committee direction.

Recommendation:

Option #1

Attachments:

1. January 8, 2026 Citizen Charter Review Committee Agenda Item on Healthcare
2. Proposed Charter Amendment to the Preamble approved by the Citizen Charter Review Committee February 5, 2026

Citizen Charter Review Committee

Agenda Item #2

January 8, 2026

To: 2025-2026 Leon County Citizen Charter Review Committee

From: Vincent S. Long, County Administrator



Title: Funding Mechanisms for Healthcare Access for Low-Income Residents

Review and Approval:	Vincent S. Long, County Administrator
Department / Division Review:	Ken Morris, Assistant County Administrator Shington Lamy, Assistant County Administrator
Lead Staff / Project Team:	Nicki Hatch, Assistant to the County Administrator for Legislative and Strategic Initiatives Abigail Thomas, Director, Office of Human Services and Community Partnerships

Statement of Issue:

As requested by the Committee at the December 4, 2025 meeting, this item provides information on the County's Health Care Program (known as CareNet) and continued strategic investments to expand healthcare access to low-income residents.

Staff Recommendation:

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

Report and Discussion

Background:

As requested by the Committee, this item provides information on the County's Health Care Program (known as CareNet) and continued strategic investments to expand healthcare access to low-income residents. During its December 4, 2025 meeting, the Committee requested further information on funding mechanisms for healthcare access to determine whether to consider a proposed charter amendment.

For more than two decades Leon County has been dedicated to ensuring low-income residents have access to high quality healthcare services. In partnership with local providers, the County has expanded healthcare services to uninsured and underinsured low-income Leon County residents for primary care, mental health, dental care, specialty services, and pharmaceutical services. As described in the item, the County invests a total of \$7.7 million in healthcare annually in mandatory and discretionary programs and services.

There are no County charters in Florida that include language regarding the provision of healthcare. County charters generally address large organizational issues focused on the authority, structure, and power of county government. As presented in this item, the Leon County Board of County Commissioners (Board) currently has the statutory authority and has been active in expanding healthcare services for uninsured and underinsured low-income residents in the community. The Board has successfully taken action to expand healthcare access through its policy, programming, and budgetary decisions without amending the Leon County Charter. Alternatively, the Committee may wish to make a recommendation encouraging the Board to continue the County's long-standing dedication to ensure low-income residents have access to high quality healthcare services in the community as described in the item. The recommendation would be included as part of the Committee's report for consideration by the Board.

Analysis:

Healthcare services for uninsured, underinsured, and elderly residents are primarily the statutory responsibility of the federal and/or state governments through programs such as Medicaid, Medicare, and the Affordable Care Act (ACA). However, pursuant to Florida Statutes, counties (both charter and non-charter) are mandated to contribute annually to the Florida Medicaid Program, County Health Departments (the 67 County Health Departments are operated by state employees under the Florida Department of Health) as well as the Baker and Marchman Act mental health and substance use disorder programs. The Florida Legislature annually establishes the level of funding that counties must contribute. For FY 2026, the County is providing \$5.9 million in statutorily required contributions. Over the past three years, the County's mandated contribution has increased approximately 15% annually.

In addition to the mandated programs, the County elected to establish the CareNet program to serve as a safety net for residents that are not eligible for healthcare through the state and/or federal programs. Although not required by the State, through CareNet, the County has partnered with local providers to expand access to healthcare for uninsured and underinsured low-income Leon County residents for more than two decades. The County is among very few counties that dedicate

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additional local tax revenue to healthcare beyond the state mandated programs. The County invests \$1.8 million annually in the CareNet program. As a result, the County invests a total of \$7.7 million in healthcare annually.

Leon County Health Care Program (CareNet)

Leon County has historically partnered with local healthcare stakeholders to provide low-income residents with access to critical medical services through CareNet. Annually, the County contracts with Bond Community Health Center (Bond), Neighborhood Medical Center (NMC), Apalachee Center (Apalachee), Capital Medical Society/We Care (We Care), and FAMU Pharmacy to provide low-income uninsured and underinsured residents access to primary care, dental, mental health, specialty care, and/or pharmaceutical services.

Bond and NMC are federally qualified healthcare centers (FQHCs) which receive annual federal funding to provide medical services to residents in Leon County. Apalachee is designated by the State of Florida as the public receiving facility for individuals experiencing mental health and/or substance abuse crisis; Apalachee receives annual funding through the State. Through CareNet, Bond, NMC, and Apalachee are reimbursed for costs incurred to provide primary, dental, and mental health visits to eligible County residents. These visits include services such as general annual physical exams; dental cleanings and extractions; case management services for mental healthcare; and more. To be eligible, a patient of Bond, NMC, or Apalachee must be a Leon County resident, 18 years old or older, and uninsured or underinsured. Additionally, the household income of a patient must be 100% or below the federal poverty level (FPL). The income requirement reflects households that are not eligible for public insurance including Medicaid, Medicare, and the ACA in the State of Florida. For example, the ACA Marketplace offers financial assistance known as subsidies for monthly premiums to enrollees with household incomes above 100% of the FPL. Subsidies are not available for individuals or families in households that earn below 100% of the FPL.

In addition to primary, dental, and mental health services, the County provides funding for specialty care and pharmaceutical services (We Care and FAMU Pharmacy, respectively). The County contracts with WeCare, which recruits medical specialists to provide specialty care to low-income residents at no charge. Specialty care services include but are not limited to cardiology, neurology, internal medicine, orthopedics, and orthodontic care. FAMU Pharmacy provides coordinated pharmacy services to County residents and addresses morbid and mortality of African Americans with Type 2 diabetes through educational programming coordination with local healthcare providers including Bond and NMC.

As mentioned earlier, the County invests \$1.8 million annually in the CareNet Program. General revenue is the funding source for the CareNet Program as well as the State mandated County contributions (i.e., Medicaid, etc.). The leveraging of County funding has been critical to expanding healthcare in the community. Over the past three years, the providers have leveraged County funding to secure \$7.5 million in state and federal funding to provide primary and mental services to additional uninsured and underinsured local-income County residents.

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Regular Community Engagement on the CareNet Program

The County regularly engages with the healthcare partners to ensure that the CareNet Program continues to provide low-income residents with access to critical medical services. Staff meets quarterly with the providers to discuss challenges and opportunities to enhance the program. During these meetings quantitative and qualitative data are evaluated and proposed changes are considered for recommendation to the Board to better position the County's program in addressing the changing healthcare needs of residents in the community. Subsequently, County staff brings proposed program enhancements to the Board for consideration as part of the budget process. Over the past several years this has led to:

- 80% increase in the reimbursement rates since FY 2023 for primary care visits to Bond, NMC, and Apalachee to more accurately reflect the cost of diagnostic and ancillary services, such as laboratory and X-Ray services.
- 40% increase in the reimbursement rates since FY 2024 for dental and mental healthcare visits to Bond, NMC, and Apalachee to include diagnostic and ancillary costs as well as the increased costs of mental healthcare.
- 30% increase in the annual investment since FY 2023 to voluntary and involuntary in-patient mental health services to Apalachee better reflect ongoing rise in costs for personnel and operations.
- 9% increase funding to WeCare since FY 2022 to enhance financial assistance to patients for specialty services including laboratory and transportation costs.

The next meeting with the healthcare partners is anticipated for January 2026. At that time any changes to the CareNet Program such as the eligibility criteria and reimbursement rates would be evaluated and discussed for potential recommendations to the Board as part of the budget process for the next fiscal year (FY 2027). This is consistent with the County's approach to addressing the most pressing human service needs in the community which includes conducting data-driven analysis, collaborating with local stakeholders, and engaging residents.

2006 Indigent Healthcare Sales Tax

Florida Statutes provide counties with a population of less than 800,000 the authority to levy a local option sales tax for indigent healthcare subject to voter approval (section 212.055(7), F.S.). Sales tax referenda are a standalone process prescribed in Florida Statutes which cannot be effectuated through a charter amendment. In 2006, the Board of County Commissioners placed a referendum on the ballot for voters to consider a local option ½ cent sales tax to support primary healthcare for low-income residents in our community. Despite the stigma associated with a new ½ cent sales tax and the potential of Leon County having the highest sales tax in the state, the referendum was placed on the 2006 General Election ballot in response to the escalating costs for health insurance, feedback from local healthcare providers, and input from the ministerial community on the long-term financial costs associated with health emergencies. In November 2006, more than three years prior to the passage of the national Affordable Care Act, 60% of Leon County voters rejected the ½ cent sales tax for indigent healthcare. Following voter rejection of the sales tax, the County continued to support primary healthcare needs with ad valorem revenues (property taxes) as previously described in this agenda item.

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County Charter Provisions Related to Healthcare Access

In summary, although healthcare services for uninsured, underinsured, and elderly residents are primarily the statutory responsibility of the federal and/or state governments, Leon County has been dedicated to ensuring low-income residents have access to high quality healthcare services in the community. Beyond the mandated financial support counties provide for several state healthcare programs, the County has dedicated additional local tax revenue to expand healthcare access for uninsured and underinsured low-income residents through the CareNet Program. In partnership with local providers, CareNet provides access to primary, dental, mental health, and specialty care, and pharmaceutical services. In total, the FY 2026 County budget invests \$7.7 million for the provision of healthcare services.

As presented in the item, the Board currently has the authority and has been active in expanding healthcare services for uninsured and underinsured local income residents in the community. The Board has successfully taken action to expand healthcare access through its policy, programming, and budgetary decisions without the need for a charter change. Additionally, county charters generally address large organizational issues focused on the authority, structure, and power of county government. For these reasons, there are no county charters in Florida that include language regarding the provision of healthcare. Alternatively, the Committee may wish to make a recommendation encouraging the Board to continue the County's long-standing commitment to ensure low-income residents have access to high quality healthcare services in the community as described in the item. The recommendation would be included as part of the Committee's report for consideration by the Board.

Options:

1. Accept the report and take no further action.
2. Direct staff to include a recommendation encouraging Leon County to continue its long-standing commitment to ensure low-income residents have access to high quality healthcare services in the community as part of the Citizen Charter Review Committee report.
3. Direct staff to draft a proposed charter amendment on access to healthcare as determined by the Citizen Charter Review Committee.
4. Board direction.

Recommendation:

Option #1

**Proposed Charter Amendment Approved by the Citizen Charter Review Committee
February 5, 2026**

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, hereby affirm the esteemed humanity of all residents of Leon County. We recognize in every person a shared dignity, not granted by government, but inherent and deserving of consideration in our public affairs.~~—and~~ In order to empower the people of this County to make changes in their own government, we do ordain and establish this Home Rule Charter for Leon County, Florida.

**LEON COUNTY CITIZEN CHARTER REVIEW
COMMITTEE**

NOTES FOR AGENDA ITEM #2

Citizen Charter Review Committee

Agenda Item #2

February 19, 2026

To: 2025-2026 Leon County Citizen Charter Review Committee

From: Vincent S. Long, County Administrator



Title: Proposed Charter Amendment on Food Insecurity

Review and Approval:	Vincent S. Long, County Administrator
Department / Division Review:	Ken Morris, Assistant County Administrator Shington Lamy, Assistant County Administrator
Lead Staff / Project Team:	Nicki Hatch, Assistant to the County Administrator for Legislative and Strategic Initiatives Abigail Thomas, Director, Human Services & Community Partnerships

Statement of Issue:

As requested by the Citizen Charter Review Committee, this item provides a proposed amendment to the Leon County Charter with ballot language to address food insecurity in the Charter. The proposed charter amendment is not recommended. There are no other county charters in the State of Florida that include the specific policy issue of food access or food insecurity. Additionally, the County Commission has the policy and budgetary authority to address food insecurity, as detailed in the item, without the need for a charter change.

Staff Recommendation:

Option #1: Approve the draft policy recommendation encouraging the Board to continue the County's long-standing commitment to reducing food insecurity in the community.

Report and Discussion

Background:

As requested by the Citizen Charter Review Committee (Committee), this item provides a proposed amendment to the Leon County Charter with ballot language to address food insecurity in the Charter (Attachment #1).

On December 18, 2025, the Committee received an analysis of the County's ongoing efforts to address food insecurity through community engagement, programs, partnerships, and investment. Specifically, the analysis highlighted the County's more than \$7.5 million investment and the delivery of nearly 55 million meals to low-income households over the last five years (Attachment #2). The item also included an analysis on the inclusion of food insecurity in the Leon County Charter and the options provided in the Food Insecurity and Charter Reform handout that was distributed by Dr. Bruce Strouble at the December 4, 2025 Committee meeting (Attachment #3). Most importantly, the item shared that there are no other county charters in the State of Florida that include the specific policy issue of food access or food insecurity and that the County Commission has the policy and budgetary authority to address food insecurity without the need for a charter change.

Subsequently during the meeting, the Committee requested staff to prepare a proposed charter amendment and ballot language as determined by the Committee. Based on the direction of the Committee and documents provided by Dr. Strouble, the following analysis presents a proposed amendment for consideration that would establish a specific policy issue in the County Charter by mandating the County to establish an Office of Food Systems to support food access and food system resilience that promote the health and well-being of residents, as well as support of food access and food systems. As presented in the item, the County has an existing department that oversees and administers programs and services dedicated to reducing food insecurity and increasing food access in the community.

Additionally, there are no other county charters in the State of Florida that include the specific policy issue of food access or food insecurity. County charters generally address large organizational issues focused on the authority, structure, and power of county government. The County Commission currently has the authority and actively addresses food insecurity through its policy, programming, partnerships, and budgetary decisions without the need for a charter change. Therefore, the proposed charter amendment is not recommended. An alternative option available to the Committee is to adopt a policy recommendation encouraging the Board to continue the County's long-standing commitment to reducing food insecurity in the community. Upon approval by the Committee, this policy recommendation would be included as part of the Committee's report to the Board.

Analysis:

Leon County is dedicated to reducing food insecurity in the community as demonstrated through long-term community partnerships, dedicated programming, and significant investments. Over the last five years, the County has invested more than \$7.5 million to support the delivery of nearly 55 million meals to low-income households.

The County has implemented these programs and investments based on strategic priorities of the Board and long-standing partnerships with local stakeholders, including the City of Tallahassee and social services agencies. The County's efforts are similar to how other communities address issues such as food insecurity as no charter counties in the State of Florida include the specific policy issue of food access or food insecurity in any charter.

Dr. Strouble's Proposed Charter Amendment

As previously mentioned, Dr. Strouble distributed a handout outlining potential options for the Committee to consider for a proposed charter amendment (Attachment #3). The options included:

- Creation of the Office of Food Access & Resilience in the County Charter
- Addition of food access and food system resilience in the County Charter as a county responsibility
- Addition of language that affirms "equitable access to nutritious food" as a guiding value in the preamble of the County Charter

The options were thoroughly analyzed in the December 18, 2025 item to the Committee reflecting the County's existing department, staffing, policies, programs, partnerships, and investments that already align with the options which are further summarized below:

Creation of the Office of Food Access & Resilience in the County Charter

The first option provided by Dr. Strouble's proposal is the establishment of an Office of Food Access & Resilience in the County Charter. However, as stated in the December 18, 2025 analysis, the County has an existing department dedicated to reducing food insecurity. The County's Office of Human Services and Community Partnerships (HSCP) is implementing the programs that address food insecurity in coordination and collaboration with local stakeholders. This includes approximately \$565,000 in annual funding to support food pantries, mobile distributions, senior nutrition services, and child meal programs which collectively distribute more than 7 million meals to low-income households annually.

Additionally, following feedback during series of dinner meetings held in neighborhoods with the highest food insecurity rates, the County established Neighborhood Engagement and Community Partnership position in HSCP which is dedicated to engaging and connecting high poverty and food insecurity neighborhoods with the available resources (i.e., food, housing, healthcare, etc.) in the community. The position actively engages and connects residents to agencies, programs, and services with available resources essential to improving quality of life and economic prosperity for individuals and families.

Addition of food access and food system resilience in the County Charter as a county responsibility

The second option of Dr. Strouble's proposal is the addition of food access and food system resilience in the County Charter as a county responsibility. However, this is primarily the responsibility of the federal and state governments, which administer a variety of programs that provide direct food assistance to address food insecurity, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and

Children (WIC), and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). Nonetheless, the County has a long-standing commitment to address food insecurity through local partnerships that increase access to food, these partnerships include:

- *Leon County Community Garden Program:* The County's Office of Sustainability provides grant support and technical assistance for residents to start community gardens to increase access to healthy food throughout the County, including on vacant County-owned land, school campuses and community spaces. Grants of up to \$1,000 are available to support garden development and sustainability efforts. Since 2024, the County has awarded a total of \$5,915 in Community Garden Grants to support eight gardens, including the Frenchtown Heritage Hub, Nims Middle School, and the Promise Land Urban Farm on Orange Street.
- *Summer Breakspot:* The County partners with Second Harvest to provide kids with free meals and snacks at four library locations during the summer months. In 2025, more than 4,255 meals were distributed.
- *Food Council:* The County actively participates in a Food Council recently launched by Florida A&M University (FAMU) focused on addressing food access and food insecurity in Leon County. The Council is comprised of local stakeholders including the County, City of Tallahassee, Second Harvest, agricultural extension offices, Leon County Schools, local farmers, and community advocates. The goal of the Food Council is to establish greater coordination and collaboration on planning, investing, and delivering programs, services, and resources that improve food access and the overall community food system for all County residents. During its Retreat in January 2026, the County Commission adopted as part of the County's five-year Strategic Plan support for FAMU's establishment of the food council and memorializing the County's commitment and participation to the effort.
- *2-1-1 Big Bend Lyft Transportation Program:* The County invests of \$112,500 annually to 2-1-1 Big Bend to provide free transportation for residents to access grocery stores, food banks, and other essential services. According to 2-1-1, nearly 4,000 Lyft rides were provided in FY 2025.
- *Partnership with Farm Share:* In December 2025, the County entered into an agreement to enhance its relationship with Farm Share to distribute food to residents through regular distribution events. The first event was held on Saturday, February 7, 2026 in the Woodville community and served more than 200 households. In partnership with Farm Share, the County will host distribution events quarterly throughout the community to expand access to healthy food and enhance food security.
- *Seed Library:* To educate and promote access to food through gardening, the County Library partners with the UF/IFAS extension office to provide seed packets to residents to grow fresh food. Since 2025, the Seed Library has distributed over 1 million seeds to the community.
- *Mobile Markets and Neighborhood Empowerment Events:* In 2022, the County partnered with Second Harvest to expand mobile food markets and establish Neighborhood Empowerment Events. These programs occur monthly to increase access to food and other social services in neighborhoods with high food insecurity and poverty rates.

Addition of language that affirms “equitable access to nutritious food” as a guiding value in the preamble of the County Charter

The final option of Dr. Strouble’s proposal is the addition of language that affirms “equitable access to nutritious food” as a guiding value in the preamble of the County Charter. Section 1 of the Charter consists of the Preamble which 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 Board.

On February 5, 2026, the Committee approved a proposed charter amendment to the Preamble for Board consideration that would express shared community values and reflect the esteemed humanity among residents of Leon County (Attachment #4). During its February 19, 2026 meeting, the Committee will consider additional revisions to the Preamble to include language that affirms the County’s commitment to healthcare and a healthy community as requested (in bold) and combines the language previously approved by the Committee to read 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, hereby affirm the esteemed humanity of all residents of Leon County. We recognize in every person a shared dignity, not granted by government, but inherent and deserving of consideration in our effort to create a community that is equitable, safe, healthy, and vibrant. ~~and~~ In order to empower the people of this County to make changes in their own government, we do ordain and establish this Home Rule Charter for Leon County, Florida.

This would incorporate the County’s existing Vision Statement as well as the include the word “equitable” in recognition of the County’s approach of considering individual circumstances to achieve a fair and impartial outcome in developing and implementing policies. That includes the County’s policies that implementing programs and making investment to enhance food access in the community. As a result, the Committee may determine that the additional language for the Preamble appropriately captures in the County’s commitment and ongoing efforts to address food insecurity and enhance food access.

As previously mentioned, language in the preamble is broad and focuses on the purpose for which residents voted to establish Leon County as a charter county. The preamble does not include any specific policy issues or make commitments for specific programs and/or services. Attempting to prioritize current challenges and preferred programs in the Charter may overlook other important community needs or lead to an endless listing of program areas being identified in the County Charter.

Therefore, given that the County already has a department dedicated to reducing food insecurity, and that food access and food system resiliency is primarily the responsibility of the federal and state government, it is not necessary to codify these matters within the Charter. However, based on the direction of the Committee, the following section presents a proposed charter amendment

to the Preamble that would reflect the County's ongoing commitment to provide residents affordable and equitable access to food.

Proposed Charter Amendment

As requested by the Committee, a proposed charter amendment and ballot language (provided in Attachment #1) were developed that would require the County to establish an Office of Food Systems under the County Administrator to support food access and food system resilience that promote the health and well-being of residents. As mentioned earlier, the County has an existing department dedicated to reducing food insecurity. HSCP is implementing programs that address food insecurity in coordination and collaboration with local stakeholders. This includes approximately \$565,000 in annual funding to support food pantries, mobile distributions, senior nutrition services, and child meal programs which collectively distribute more than 7 million meals to low-income households annually.

The proposed charter amendment would also require the establishment of a Countywide Food System Plan with annual reporting. This would circumvent the work that is currently being conducted by FAMU to establish a Food Council comprised of local stakeholders including the County, City, Leon County Schools, Second Harvest, 2-1-1 Big Bend and other partners for greater coordination and collaboration on planning, investing, and delivering programs, services, and resources that improve food access and the overall community food system for all County residents. The Council meets monthly and recent meetings have included discussion on developing a plan that captures data, identifies needs, details resources available to and/or required for neighborhoods and communities with high food insecurity rates, and identifies key partners, roles and responsibilities. In recognition of the importance of the Food Council in fostering collective community buy-in on the issue of food security and food access the Board adopted the following strategic initiative the County's five-year Strategic Plan:

- *Support the efforts of Florida A&M University, Second Harvest of the Big Bend, Feeding Florida and other stakeholders to establish a food council to coordinate the local food system and food resources.*

It is also important to note that requiring the establishment of a Countywide Food System Plan in the Charter would not require any other governments, educational institutions, or nonprofit organizations to adhere to the document. The County Charter cannot compel an independent organization to comply with the a Food System Plan.

Due to the existing County department addressing the food insecurity and the ongoing work of the Food Council established by FAMU, the proposed charter amendment is not recommended. However, should the Committee wish to move forward with the proposed charter amendment, the proposed ballot title and ballot language reflected in Table #1 were developed. The ballot title and ballot language would meet the statutorily required word count limit. The ballot title is limited to 15 words, and the ballot language is limited to 75 words.

Table #1. Proposed Ballot Title and Ballot Language

Proposed Ballot Title
Establishment of an Office of Food Systems in the Leon County Charter
Proposed Ballot Language
Shall the Leon County Charter be amended to require the County to establish an Office of Food Systems to support food access and food systems, and require the establishment of a Countywide Food Systems Plan?

A simple majority is needed to recommend a charter amendment to the Board. A status report on the Committee’s recommendation(s) will be provided to the Board at its regularly scheduled meeting on March 10, 2026. Upon approval by a simple majority of the Board, public hearings will be scheduled in June or July 2026, for the Committee to take public input and formally consider the proposed Charter amendments. The outcome of the public hearings will be reflected in the Committee’s final report to the Board in August 2026.

As previously stated, there are no other county charters in the State of Florida that include the specific policy issue of food access or food insecurity. County charters generally address large organizational issues focused on the authority, structure, and power of county government. The County Commission currently has the authority and actively addresses food insecurity through its policy, programming, partnerships, and budgetary decisions without the need for a charter change. Additionally, the Committee may determine its recent approval and further consideration of a proposed charter amendment for revisions to the Preamble appropriately captures in the County’s commitment and ongoing efforts to address food insecurity and enhance food access.

Therefore, the proposed charter amendment on the specific policy issue of food access is not recommended. An alternative option available to the Committee is to adopt a policy recommendation as shown in Table #2, encouraging the Board to continue the County’s long-standing commitment to reducing food insecurity in the community. Upon approval by the Committee, this policy recommendation would be included as part of the Committee’s report to the Board.

Table #2. Draft Policy Recommendation to Board of County Commissioners

Draft Policy Recommendation
The Leon County Citizen Charter Review Committee encourages the Board of County Commissioners to continue Leon County’s long-standing commitment to reducing food insecurity in the community through the utilization of empirical data, active engagement, significant investment, and critical programming in partnership with local stakeholders that increase food access in neighborhoods with high food insecurity rates.

Options:

1. Approve the draft policy recommendation encouraging the Board to continue the County's long-standing commitment to reducing food insecurity in the community.
2. Approve the proposed charter amendment for recommendation to the Board of County Commissioner to address food insecurity in the Leon County Charter (Attachment #1).
3. Committee direction.

Recommendation:

Option #1

Attachments:

1. Proposed Charter Amendment on Addressing Food Insecurity
2. December 18, 2025 Citizen Charter Review Committee Agenda Item on Food Insecurity
3. Food Security & Charter Reform Handout provided by Dr. Bruce Strouble
4. Proposed Charter Amendment to the Preamble approved by the Citizen Charter Review Committee February 5, 2026

Proposed Charter Amendment

Sec. 1.XX – Establishment of the Office of Food Systems

- (1) The County shall establish the Office of Food System under the County Administrator to support food access and food system resilience that promote the health and well-being of residents. The Office of Food Systems shall develop a Countywide Food Systems Plan and develop an annual report.
- (2) The Board of County Commissioners shall determine the appropriate funding level and funding source of Leon County investment to advance policies, programs, and partnerships that support food security for all residents.
- (3) The Board of County Commissioners shall enact an ordinance within 12 months of the passage of this amendment by the voters of Leon County to implement the establishment of the Office of Food Systems.

Proposed Ballot Title

Leon County Charter Amendment Establishing the Office of Food System

Proposed Ballot Language

Shall the Leon County Charter be amended to establish an Office of Food System?

Citizen Charter Review Committee

Agenda Item #2

December 18, 2025

To: 2025-2026 Leon County Citizen Charter Review Committee

From: Vincent S. Long, County Administrator 

Title: Food Insecurity Provisions

Review and Approval:	Vincent S. Long, County Administrator
Department / Division Review:	Ken Morris, Assistant County Administrator Shington Lamy, Assistant County Administrator
Lead Staff / Project Team:	Nicki Hatch, Assistant to the County Administrator for Legislative and Strategic Initiatives Abigail Thomas, Director, Office of Human Services and Community Partnerships

Statement of Issue:

At its December 4, 2025 meeting, the Citizen Charter Review Committee (Committee) requested an agenda item related to food security in the Leon County Charter. For the Committee's consideration of this issue, this item provides the requested analysis including information on the County's ongoing efforts to address food insecurity through community engagement, programs, partnerships, and investment.

Staff Recommendation:

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

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Report and Discussion

Background:

As requested by the Committee at its December 4, 2025 meeting, this item provides an analysis on the inclusion of food security in the Leon County Charter. This item also provides information on the County's longstanding commitment and ongoing efforts to address food insecurity through community engagement, programs, partnerships, and investment.

During the December 4th meeting, Dr. Bruce Strouble disseminated a handout on food security for inclusion in the County Charter. The three options include establishing a new County office in the County Charter related to food access; enacting food security as a County responsibility; and incorporating a value statement to affirm the County's commitment to "equitable access to nutritious food" in the County Charter. Subsequently, the Committee requested an agenda item to further consider the three options for a potential charter amendment.

Reducing food insecurity in the community is a high priority of Leon County as demonstrated through intentional community engagement; innovative programs; long-term community partnerships; and significant investments that are responding to the community needs. This has resulted in over \$7.5 million invested by the County and the delivery of nearly 55 million meals to low-income households over the last five years.

As presented in this item, the Leon County Board of County Commissioners (Board) currently has the authority to address food insecurity. The Board has successfully taken action to reduce food insecurity through its policy, programming, and budgetary decisions without amending the Leon County Charter. County charters generally address large organizational issues focused on the authority, structure, and power of county government. For this reason, there are no County charters in Florida that include language regarding food insecurity. Alternatively, the Committee may wish to make a recommendation encouraging the Board to continue the County's long-standing commitment to reducing food insecurity in the community as described in the item. The recommendation would be included as part of the Committee's report for consideration by the Board.

Analysis:

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food insecurity as a household-level economic and social condition characterized by limited or uncertain access to adequate food. According to Feeding America, factors (i.e., root causes) for food insecurity include "a lack of income or other resources" such as transportation and knowledge/access to available services.

Food insecurity is addressed primarily through a variety of programs funded and administered by the federal and/or state governments. The mission of the USDA Division of Food and Nutrition Service is to "increase food security and reduce hunger" by funding a network of programs that provide direct food assistance, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), child nutrition programs, Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEAP).

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In Florida, several state agencies administer the USDA programs, including the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Sciences, Department of Children and Families, and the Department of Health. In addition to administering the federal programs, the state agencies implement a wide variety of programs that address the factors or root causes of food insecurity including homelessness, housing, and healthcare.

As a long-standing priority of Leon County, the County leads coordination with local partners to identify opportunities to augment state and federal programs in a collective effort to reduce food insecurity. The following information details the County's extensive and ongoing efforts to actively engage residents on short and long-term solutions; investments in established and innovative programming and services that are expanding access to food; and highlights the County's collaboration and coordination with local stakeholders to respond to the changing needs in the community.

Leon County's Ongoing Efforts and Investments to Address Food Insecurity

County-Led Community Engagement

The County places a high emphasis on engaging the community in addressing food insecurity. In 2022, in partnership with Second Harvest, the City, and the Children's Services Council of Leon County (CSC Leon), the County hosted dinners entitled, *Breaking Bread Together: Neighborhood Dinner and Conversation on Tackling Food Insecurity*. Nearly 300 Leon County residents participated in the nine dinner meetings held in the neighborhoods with the highest food insecurity rates based on Feed America and U.S. Census data. Participants included neighborhood residents, neighborhood business owners, faith-based leaders, not-for-profit organization representatives, and the United Way of the Big Bend (UWBB). These meetings focused on identifying barriers to food access and developing collaborative solutions.

The main theme that emerged during each meeting was that residents of the neighborhoods were unaware of the significant level of resources available in the community to address food insecurity as well as overall basic needs such as childcare, healthcare, and employment services. In response, the County partnered with the City, CSC Leon, and UWBB to establish the Trusted People Neighborhood Engagement Committee (Trusted People Committee). The Committee is comprised of neighborhood leaders and stakeholders from Bond, Frenchtown, Griffin Heights, Providence, South City, and Woodville neighborhoods that are appointed by the County, City, CSC Leon, and UWBB. The Trusted People Committee works with the County and partners to engage the residents to raise awareness and connect them to resources in the community that provide access to food and enhances their quality of life. Through work with the Trusted People Committee, the County and partners have collaborated on events such as cooking classes, housing workshops, and youth job fairs that seek to reduce food insecurity while also enhancing the overall quality of life and economic security of the neighborhoods. This community-driven approach to address food insecurity was nationally recognized with a National Association of Counties Achievement Award in 2024. As presented further in the item, the dinner meetings also led to the establishment of the Neighborhood Engagement and Community Partnership position which actively engages and connects residents to agencies, programs, and services focused on improving quality of life and economic prosperity for individuals and families.

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Community Human Services Partnerships (CHSP) Annual Funding

Leon County is committed to combating food insecurity by providing annual funding to local organizations in partnership with the City through CHSP. For nearly 30 years, the County and City have partnered to plan, coordinate, and invest in human services through CHSP. The County's investment ensures access to nutritious food for individuals and families by supporting a variety of programs ranging from food pantries and mobile distributions to senior nutrition services and child meal programs, including:

- *Second Harvest of the Big Bend:* Second Harvest operates a variety of robust and comprehensive programs that provide healthy food for individuals and families in Leon County and the surrounding areas. Through CHSP, Second Harvest distributes pantry staples, fresh produce, and meat to approximately 68 pantry partner agencies throughout Leon County. These partners collectively offer food assistance approximately 200 times per month to residents in need. Additionally, Second Harvest has hosted over 30 targeted community food distributions in Leon County this year. Through its Senior Grocery Program, Second Harvest helps feed low-income seniors in the community at the end of the month when their financial resources have been exhausted. Currently, the program provides food to hundreds of seniors each month, including cereal, canned fruits and vegetables, proteins and grains, fresh bread, and produce. In addition, Second Harvest responds to cover the food needs of families during unexpected disasters and emergencies which quickly increase the number of people needing food stabilization support.

CHSP funding also supports Second Harvest's operation of a robust program through school pantries and mobile markets in the Promise Zone. The CHSP Promise Zone category funds human service programs that specifically serve neighborhoods in census tracts with high poverty rates and include Bond, Frenchtown, Griffin Heights, and South City. Though all of these neighborhoods are exclusively within the City limits, County and City funding is provided through CHSP to jointly support social service needs in our community. The School Pantry Program offers access to nutritious food for children and their families struggling with hunger through a food pantry in their school by providing fresh fruits and vegetables, meat or protein options, and other pantry staples. Mobile markets are "pantries on wheels" brought into the targeted neighborhoods to ensure neighbors can obtain nutritious food for their families through a grocery store shopping experience.

- *Elder Care Services:* CHSP funds Elder Care Services Nutrition Program. Elder Care Services is the leading provider of community-based senior care in Leon County which includes specialized support, outreach services, and meals. Elder Care Services delivers essential nutrition to Leon County residents aged 60 and older who are at nutritional risk and homebound due to illness or disability through their Meals on Wheels program. Additionally, Elder Care Services operates seven congregate meal sites, including Westminster Oaks, the Senior Center, Bethel Towers, Casa Calderon, Lincoln Neighborhood Center, Miracle Village, and Smith-Williams Service Center. The congregate meal sites create opportunities for seniors to build community, receive social support, and reduce food insecurity and isolation. These sites serve older adults who can leave their homes but may face economic or social challenges. Due to CHSP funding,

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Elder Care Services served 681 unduplicated seniors with over 91,000 meals through the Meals on Wheels Program and congregate meal sites last year (FY 2025).

- *Good News Outreach:* CHSP funds the Good News Outreach's Food Pantry Program which provides critical resources to the community through several social safety net programs. For individuals who are disabled or unable to travel, Good News Outreach offers once a month home delivery of groceries to residents in need. In FY 2025, CHSP funding supported the program in serving more than 3,000 unduplicated residents across Leon County.

Expanding Food Access Through Community Partnerships

Building upon the direct support provided through CHSP, the County remains committed to working with local partners in investing in programs to reduce food insecurity by addressing both access and availability within high-need communities. These collaborative efforts include transportation assistance to support access to fresh food, grocery lockers, mobile markets, meal sites for children, innovative gardening incentive programs, and new food distribution opportunities, as detailed below.

- *2-1-1 Big Bend Lyft Program.* As previously mentioned, the Breaking Bread Community dinner revealed the lack of access as a significant barrier to food security, particularly for residents in underserved areas. To help address the need for greater knowledge of available resources and transportation, the County expanded its partnership with 2-1-1 Big Bend to provide annual direct funding for the 24-hour Helpline and the Lyft transportation program. The 2-1-1 Lyft Program provides Leon County residents with free rideshare transportation to grocery stores, food distribution sites, and other critical resources. Through this program, veterans are eligible for up to five rides per month, while other residents can request one ride per month. According to 2-1-1, nearly 4,000 Lyft rides were provided in FY 2025.
- *Grocery Lockers.* In another effort to expand access to food, the County, in partnership with the City and Second Harvest, purchased and installed four temperature-controlled grocery lockers in neighborhoods that have historically experienced poverty and high food insecurity rates. The lockers were installed at Sabal Palm Elementary in the Providence neighborhood, Hartsfield Elementary, Good News Outreach in Frenchtown, and Neighborhood Medical Center in South City following feedback gathered during nine community dinners in 2022, ensuring alignment with neighborhood needs. The lockers are accessible 24/7 and, through Second Harvest, provide fresh, healthy, and nutritious food options to residents. Since their launch, the food lockers have provided over 17,000 meals to more than 3,200 residents, significantly expanding access to nutritious food in high-need areas.
- *Mobile Markets and Neighborhood Empowerment Events:* In 2023, the County funded Second Harvest's purchase of 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 not only provide families with fresh produce and nonperishable food items but also include local human service providers to offer families an array of services, including employment assistance, healthcare, legal support, SNAP benefits enrollment, and other essential resources. Mobile

markets are hosted several times a month and Neighborhood Empowerment events are held monthly throughout the community. Both mobile markets and Neighborhood Empowerment events occur in neighborhoods with high food insecurity rates, including the Lincoln Center in Frenchtown, Springfield Apartments in Griffin Heights, and Bond Community Health Center in South City.

- *Summer BreakSpot and Kids Café.* The County also partners with Second Harvest to serve as Summer BreakSpot locations at the Main Library, Dr. BL Perry, Jr. Branch, Jane G. Sauls Fort Braden Branch, and the Woodville Branch. Summer BreakSpot provides kids with free meals and snacks during the summer months to ensure that children have a stable source of food when school is out. This year, these four library locations distributed 4,255 meals to kids from June 2nd to August 1st, which is more than any previous summer. Throughout the year, the Main Library is also a location for the Kid's Café program, which provides Leon County children with food from Second Harvest after school. The program operates from August to June and helps bridge the gap for children who receive most of their meals from school.
- *Seed Library.* To educate and promote access to food through gardening, the Library also partners with UF/IFAS Leon County Extension to host the Seed Library Program. Launched in February 2015, the Seed Library Program provides residents up to five seed packets per month using their library card, or three packets per month without a library card, at any branch library that can be planted to grow food. Each year, the Seed Library hosts two kick-offs at the beginning of the spring and fall to introduce the seasonal seed varieties available to Library patrons and County residents.
- *Leon County Community Garden Program.* In addition to the Seed Library, to encourage residents to grow their own nutritious food, 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.

The gardens play a vital role in enhancing food access; promoting local food production; offering hands-on education in gardening and nutrition for children and families; and strengthening neighborhood connections and community health. 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.

- *Partnership with Farm Share.* Building on our efforts to address food insecurity in the community, the County recently entered into a formal agreement that will enhance its collaboration with Farm Share, Inc. (Farm Share), to distribute fresh produce to residents. Farm Share is a not-for-profit organization located throughout Florida that works directly with local farmers to provide fresh produce such as fruits and vegetables to the community and neighborhoods in the Big Bend region with high needs. Over the past few years, Farm Share has held more than 120 food distribution events in Leon County, including at the North Florida Fairgrounds and Health Department locations. Each event serves 250 to

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1,000 families with 25-pound food boxes. Last year, Farm Share distributed 1.4 million pounds of food through distribution events and food pantries in Leon County.

Upon request, the County coordinates with Farm Share on equipment, supplies needs, and operational support (i.e., equipment, law enforcement, traffic control, event staffing support, insurance, etc.) for food distribution events at the North Florida Fairgrounds, state Health Department locations, and County facilities (parks and libraries). The County also works with Farm Share to promote the food distribution events to neighborhoods in Leon County with high poverty and food insecurity rates, and collaborates with local stakeholders such as Second Harvest, the Tallahassee Urban League, and other social service organizations to connect residents to essential resources during the food distribution events. This partnership expands resident and neighborhood access to fresh produce and nutritious meals that serve to reduce food insecurity in the community.

Consideration of Leon County Charter Amendments Related to Food Security

As mentioned earlier, the Committee requested an analysis on the inclusion of food security in the Leon County Charter. During the December 4th meeting, Dr. Bruce Strouble provided a handout with specific options for the Committee to consider for a proposed charter amendment (Attachment #1). The options included:

- Creation of the Office of Food Access & Resilience in the County Charter
- Addition of food access and food system resilience in the County Charter as a county responsibility
- Addition of language that affirms “equitable access to nutritious food” as a guiding value in the preamble of the County Charter

The following provides an analysis of each option presented in the handout:

- *Creation of the Office of Food Access & Resilience.* The County has an existing department dedicated to reducing food insecurity. The County’s Office of Human Services and Community Partnerships (HSCP) is implementing the programs (CHSP, Grocery Lockers, etc.) that address food insecurity in coordination and collaboration with local stakeholders including the City, not-for-profit organizations, and neighborhoods. Simultaneously, HSCP coordinates and collaborates with community partners to deliver resources (housing, transportation, healthcare, etc.) that commonly serve as root causes of food insecurity.

Additionally, following feedback during the series of neighborhood meetings presented earlier, the County established Neighborhood Engagement and Community Partnership position which is dedicated to engaging and connecting high poverty and food insecurity neighborhoods with the available resources (i.e., food, housing, healthcare, etc.) in the community. The position actively engages and connects residents to agencies, programs, and services focused on improving quality of life and economic prosperity for individuals and families. These efforts include staffing quarterly meetings with the Trusted People Committee; holding neighborhood events in partnership with local providers on food, housing and other human services; and participating in neighborhood association meetings to ensure residents have the knowledge and access to essential and available resources.

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- *Food access and food system resilience as a county responsibility.* As presented earlier, food access and food system resilience is primarily the responsibility of the federal and state governments. Federal and state agencies administer a variety of programs including SNAP, WIC, and TEAP that were designed to address food insecurity. As detailed throughout the item, the County has actively identified opportunities to augment state and federal programs in a collective effort improve food access and food system through policies, community engagement, partnerships, programming, and investments.
- *Affirming “equitable access to nutritious food” as a guiding value in the preamble.* The County Charter states 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.*

The language in the preamble is broad and focuses on the purpose for which residents voted to establish Leon County as a charter county. The preamble does not include any specific policy issues or make commitments for specific programs and/or services. Attempting to prioritize current challenges and preferred programs in the Charter may overlook other important community needs or lead to an endless listing of program areas being identified in the County Charter.

In evaluating the other charter counties in the State of Florida, the specific policy issue of food access or food security is not included in any charter. County charters tend to address large organizational issues focused on the authority, structure, and power of the government. As presented in this item, the Board currently has the authority to address food insecurity, which continues to be demonstrated through its policy, programming and budgetary decisions without the need for charter change. Therefore, a charter amendment would not be necessary.

Additionally, a proposed charter amendment would not be consistent with the County’s methodical approach for addressing food insecurity and the ever-changing needs of their respective communities. As highlighted through the item, in order to respond to the most pressing human service needs in the community, the County regularly conducts data-driven analysis, collaborates with local stakeholders, and engages impacted residents. Through this approach, the County has successfully maximized efficiency, reduced duplication, and optimized limited human services resources to address the community’s most critical needs such as food insecurity, as well as emergency homeless shelters, affordable housing, and primary health care.

With these considerations in mind, alternatively, the Committee may wish to make a recommendation encouraging the Board to continue the County’s long-standing commitment to reducing food insecurity in the community. The recommendation would be included as part of the Committee’s report for consideration by the Board.

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Conclusion

Leon County remains dedicated to addressing food insecurity in the community. Although food access and food resilience is primarily the responsibility of federal and state governments, the County in coordination with local partners have augmented state and federal programs in a collective effort to reduce food insecurity. Over the past five years, the County has invested more than \$7.6 million and delivered nearly 55 million meals in the community. This has been accomplished utilizing data-driven analysis, collaboration with local stakeholders, and engaging impacted residents.

In evaluating the other charter counties in the State of Florida, the specific policy issue of food access or food security is not included in any charter. County charters tend to address large organizational issues focused on the authority, structure, and power of the government. As presented in this item, the Board currently has the authority to address food insecurity, which continues to be demonstrated through its policy, programming and budgetary decisions without the need for charter change. Therefore, a charter amendment would not be necessary.

Alternatively, the Committee may wish to make a recommendation encouraging the Board to continue the County's long-standing commitment to reducing food insecurity in the community. The recommendation would be included as part of the Committee's report for consideration by the Board.

Options:

1. Accept the report and take no further action.
2. Direct staff to include a recommendation encouraging Leon County to continue its long-standing commitment to reduce food insecurity in the community as part of the Citizen Charter Review Committee report.
3. Direct staff to draft a proposed charter amendment on food insecurity as determined by the Citizen Charter Review Committee.
4. Committee direction.

Recommendation:

Option #1

Attachment:

1. Food Security & Charter Reform Handout provided by Dr. Bruce Strouble, December 4, 2025

Food Security & Charter Reform

Dr. Bruce Strouble – Leon County Charter Review Committee

Why Food Security Belongs in the Charter

- Over **30,000 Leon County residents** are food insecure (Feeding America, 2024).
- Food insecurity rates have been as high as **19.7%** in recent years (CLEO Institute, 2019).
- Burden is heaviest on **Black households, single mothers, seniors, and 32304 residents** (CLEO Institute, 2019; Leon County Prosperity Report, 2023).
- Seniors show significant food insecurity due to fixed incomes and transportation barriers (Opalinski et al., 2023).
- County food relief programs are *discretionary*; Charter codification ensures continuity regardless of politics (Leon County FY22 Budget Notes).
- Climate shocks, inflation, and supply chain disruptions increase food insecurity risk, making it a **public health and resilience** obligation (CLEO Institute, 2019).

What Other Governments Are Doing

- **New York City Charter** mandates an Office of Food Policy and a ten-year coordinated food plan (NYC Charter §§20-a, 20-i).
- **Toronto** and **Vancouver** adopted Food Charters establishing food access as a community right (Toronto Food Charter, 2001; Vancouver Food Charter, 2007).
- **Belo Horizonte** constitutionally guarantees the right to adequate food, which reduced hunger and child malnutrition (Belo Horizonte Food Security Policy, 1993).
- **Maine** became the first U.S. state to adopt a constitutional *Right to Food* (Maine Const. Art. I §25, 2021).

Three Options for Leon County

1. Office of Food Access & Resilience (Heaviest Lift)

Creates a permanent office (Article II) dedicated to coordinating food system equity, emergency food planning, and resilience efforts, similar to NYC's charter-based Office of Food Policy (NYC Charter §20-i).

2. Article I Amendment (Medium Lift)

Adds food access and food system resilience as a **constitutional county duty**, aligning Leon County with global right-to-food frameworks (Toronto Food Charter; Maine Constitution, 2021).

3. Preamble Update (Lightest Lift)

Adds language affirming "equitable access to nutritious food" as a guiding value. This mirrors values-based food security language in Vancouver and Toronto Food Charters.

Closing Statement

Food access is not partisan it is essential. With over 30,000 food-insecure neighbors and disproportionate burdens on historically marginalized communities, Leon County must adopt at least one of these Charter reforms to establish long-term, structural commitment to food access and resilience.

References

- Feeding America. (2024). *Map the Meal Gap: County Food Insecurity Data*.
- CLEO Institute. (2019). *Leon County Food Insecurity Policy Brief*.
- Opalinski, A., et al. (2023). Food insecurity among older adults in Leon County. *Public Health Research & Practice*.
- Leon County Government. (2022). *FY22 Budget Notes and Food Insecurity Allocations*.
- New York City Charter §§20-a, 20-i. (Office of Food Policy; Office of Urban Agriculture).
- Toronto Food Charter. (Toronto City Council, 2001).
- Vancouver Food Charter. (City of Vancouver, 2007).
- Belo Horizonte Municipal Food and Nutrition Security Policy. (1993).
- Maine Constitution, Article I, Section 25 – Right to Food. (2021).
- Leon County Prosperity Report. (2023). *32304 and Disproportionate Hardship Data*.

**Proposed Charter Amendment Approved by the Citizen Charter Review Committee
February 5, 2026**

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, hereby affirm the esteemed humanity of all residents of Leon County. We recognize in every person a shared dignity, not granted by government, but inherent and deserving of consideration in our public affairs.—~~and~~ In order to empower the people of this County to make changes in their own government, we do ordain and establish this Home Rule Charter for Leon County, Florida.

**LEON COUNTY CITIZEN CHARTER REVIEW
COMMITTEE**

NOTES FOR AGENDA ITEM #3

Citizen Charter Review Committee

Agenda Item #3

February 19, 2026

To: 2025-2026 Leon County Citizen Charter Review Committee

From: Vincent S. Long, County Administrator



Title: Proposed Charter Amendment on Persistent Disparities Resulting from Historic Public Policies

Review and Approval:	Vincent S. Long, County Administrator
Department / Division Review:	Ken Morris, Assistant County Administrator Shington Lamy, Assistant County Administrator
Lead Staff / Project Team:	Nicki Hatch, Assistant to the County Administrator for Legislative and Strategic Initiatives Abigail Thomas, Director, Human Services & Community Partnerships

Statement of Issue:

As requested by the Citizen Charter Review Committee, this item provides a proposed charter amendment and corresponding ballot language to address persistent disparities resulting from historic public policy decisions in the Leon County Charter (Charter). The proposed charter amendment is not recommended. There are no county charters in Florida that include language related to disparities from historic public policies. As detailed in the item, consideration and/or adoption of the proposed amendment into the Charter could put the County's federal and state funding in jeopardy, as well as result in legal challenges against the County.

Staff Recommendation:

Option #1: Approve the draft recommendation encouraging the Board to continue the County's long-standing commitment to addressing poverty and inequities in the community.

Report and Discussion

Background:

As requested by the Citizen Charter Review Committee (Committee), this item provides a proposed charter amendment and corresponding ballot language to address persistent disparities resulting from historic public policy decisions in the Leon County Charter (Attachment #1). The proposed charter amendment is not recommended. There are no county charters in Florida that include language related to disparities from historic public policies which, as defined by the proposed amendment, includes slavery and Jim Crow laws. As detailed in the item, consideration and/or adoption of the proposed amendment into the Charter could put the County's federal and state funding in jeopardy, as well as result in legal challenges against the County. The Florida Legislature is actively considering legislation that would prohibit policies and programs that seek to address racial disenfranchisement and/or disparities and enact punitive measures for the adoption and/or implementation of such policies and programs, including the removal of elected officials from office.

On January 22, 2026, the Committee received an analysis of the County's ongoing efforts to reduce poverty and inequity in the community (Attachment #2). Furthermore, the item included an analysis of Dr. Bruce Strouble's proposal (Attachment #3) to amend the County Charter by creating a new section that would require the County to establish programs and funding targeted to communities that have experienced historic racial discrimination. As presented in that item, 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). Accordingly, 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.

Subsequently, the Committee requested staff to prepare a proposed charter amendment and corresponding ballot language requiring the County to assess and address persistent disparities resulting from historic public policy decisions. There are no county charters in Florida that include language related to disparities from historic public policies. Additionally, the language such as "persistent disparities" and "historic public policy decisions" are vague and would not provide clarity on the proposed amendment that voters will consider on the ballot. Section 101.161(1), Florida Statutes, states that a ballot summary of any constitutional amendment or other public measure must be printed in clear and unambiguous language. Furthermore, courts have ruled that, while ballot language need not explain every detail or ramification, the language must be clear and give voters fair notice of the decision he or she must make. Therefore, the proposed charter amendment was developed based on the documents submitted by Dr. Strouble which included model language that identifies historic public policy decisions as policies that resulted in racial discrimination (i.e., slavery, Jim Crow laws, etc.). The following analysis presents a proposed charter amendment for consideration that would require the County to assess and address persistent disparities resulting from any historic public policy decisions such as slavery, Jim Crow laws, and other racial disenfranchisement practices.

However, it is important to note that the County utilizes empirical data and community engagement that has resulted in more than \$30 million in human services programs, healthcare, housing, and economic development within the past five years. Additionally, the County has dedicated more than \$300 million on infrastructure projects through Blueprint in high poverty neighborhoods which represents 62% of projects planned and underway at Blueprint.

As mentioned earlier, there are no county charters in Florida that include language related to disparities from historic public policies. County charters generally address large organizational issues focused on the authority, structure, and power of county government. As presented in this item and the previous Committee item, the Leon County Board of County Commissioners (Board) currently has the statutory authority and has been active in addressing poverty and inequities in the community through policies, programs, and investments. The Board has successfully acted through its policy, programming, and budgetary decisions without amending the Leon County Charter. Adopting language that addresses historic racial discrimination could put the County's federal and state funding in jeopardy, as well as result in legal challenges against the County. **Therefore, it is recommended that the Committee not pursue a charter amendment to require the County to assess and address persistent disparities resulting from historic public policy decisions.**

However, the Committee may determine its recent actions taken to recommend a proposed charter amendment revising the Preamble of the County Charter sufficiently reflects the County's commitment to addressing poverty and inequity in the community. At its February 5, 2026 meeting, the Committee approved a proposed charter amendment for recommendation to the Board revising the Preamble to affirm the esteemed humanity among residents of Leon County is a shared community value. As detailed at that time, the Preamble serves as an introduction and broadly reflects what the Charter seeks to achieve, it does not delineate specific structures, authorities, policies, or provision of services for the county government. Furthermore, the Preamble is intentionally broad so that the County can adapt and respond to new challenges as determined by the elected County Commission.

Accordingly, the Committee could consider an amendment to the Preamble to codify the County's commitment to addressing poverty and inequity as a guiding aspiration of the document while mitigating potential conflicts with state and federal laws. In addition to the proposed charter amendment to the Preamble, 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 to the Board.

Analysis:

As previously provided, Leon County 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. By utilizing empirical data, including socioeconomic information, the County can target programs and investments in neighborhoods with the highest needs. While the

efforts do not specifically focus on racial inequities, the neighborhoods that have historically experienced poverty have a higher population of minorities compared to the overall County population. 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. These actions include 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. As reported through annual reports, 75% of residents served by human service agencies through the CHSP program live in these neighborhoods.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- To address the highest affordable housing need in the community of affordable rental units for very low-income households, the County invested:
 - \$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.
 - \$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.
- 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 that memorializes the County's ongoing efforts to spur economic growth in neighborhoods that have historically experienced poverty.

At the same time, the County has dedicated \$319 million through the Blueprint Intergovernmental Agency (Blueprint) on infrastructure in high poverty neighborhoods. In fact, 20 of the 32 Blueprint projects (62%) planned or underway are 32301, 32303, 32304, and 32305. 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.

The County has implemented these programs and investments based on strategic priorities of the Board and long-standing partnerships with local stakeholders, including the City and social services agencies. The County's efforts are similar to how other communities address socioeconomic disparities as no charter counties in the State of Florida include the specific policy issue of addressing harms from historic public policy in any charter. Further, the current practice of addressing poverty through strategic initiatives, targeted investments, and long-standing partnerships that do not utilize race and gender as a determining factor in service provision may reduce the County's risk of jeopardizing federal or state funding and potential for legal challenges.

Minority and Women Business Enterprise (MWSBE) Program

In addition to programs addressing the human services, financial empowerment, infrastructure 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 within the County for small businesses. The program provides an incentive for small businesses to access County, City, and Blueprint 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, City and Blueprint contracts. Today, the program operates as a joint office of the County and City under the OEV.

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 City or Blueprint. 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.

Proposed Charter Amendment

There are no county charters in Florida that include language related to persistent disparities from historic public policies. However, as requested by the Committee, a proposed charter amendment and ballot language is provided in Attachment #1 that would require the County to assess and address persistent disparities resulting from historic public policy decisions. Based on the documents provided by Dr. Strouble, the proposed amendment would include the following:

- Defines “persistent disparities” as individuals or communities whose ancestors were subjected to historic policy decisions that resulted in disenfranchisement and/or disinvestment based on race.
- Defines “historic policy decisions” as the following:
 - Forced or compulsory labor systems in effect prior to 1865 (i.e., slavery);
 - Post-Emancipation systems of coerced labor, including debt peonage and convict leasing;
 - Legally mandated racial segregation in housing, education, health care, transportation, employment, or public services;
 - Exclusionary zoning, land use restrictions, or racially restrictive covenants enforced or sanctioned by Leon County;
 - Mid-century urban renewal, clearance, or redevelopment programs that displaced communities based on racial criteria under a then-existing Leon County policy; and
 - Documented denial of access to publicly funded services by the County on the basis of statutory racial classifications.
- Requires the County to conduct historical impact audits every five (5) years to identify individuals and/or communities that experienced disparities from historic public policies as defined in the amendment; document the specific policies; assess the present disparities; and provide recommendations for programs, services, and investments (i.e., restoration activities) to “repair or mitigate” the disparities.
- Requires the County to incorporate the findings of the historical impact audits into planning documents such as capital improvement and the comprehensive plan.
- Authorizes the County Commission to establish a Community Restoration Fund dedicated solely to support programs, services, and investments (i.e., restoration activities) that benefit individuals and/or communities that have experienced disparities from historic public policies as defined in the amendment.

- Authorizes the County to prioritize access to County-owned land to individuals and/or communities that experienced disparities from historic public policies as defined in the amendment.
- Requires the County Commission to adopt an ordinance to implement the proposed charter amendment that would include the definition of eligibility for individuals and/or communities that experienced disparities from historic public policies; process for eligibility verification; structure for community engagement; and safeguards to ensure any programs, services, or investments remain exclusive to individuals and/or communities that experienced disparities from historic public policies as defined in the amendment.

The proposed charter amendment prepared based on the direction of the Committee could present legal and fiscal challenges for the County. 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. As a result, 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 result in legal challenges against the County.

Under the U.S. Constitution, generally programs that differentiate based on race are subject to strict scrutiny. Various cases have litigated whether the government may permissibly act to remedy past discrimination. Every case is fact-specific, with few clearly drawn lines. To meet the strict scrutiny test, the government must demonstrate that the law serves a compelling government interest and is narrowly tailored to achieve that interest. The law must also be the least restrictive means available to further that interest. There are recent cases where government programs that used race as an eligibility factor have been enjoined and struck down (see, e.g., *Students for Fair Admissions v. President and Fellows of Harvard College* and *Students for Fair Admissions v. University of North Carolina*, 600 U.S. 181 (2023) (holding that racial preferences in college admissions violate the Fourteenth Amendment and Title VI).

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, the Florida Legislature is considering legislation that would prohibit local governments from adopting or funding DEI-related policies and programs. The definition of DEI in the legislation includes promoting or providing "preferential treatment or special benefits to a person or group based on that person's or group's race, color, sex, ethnicity, gender identity, or sexual orientation". Based on the legislation, the proposed charter amendment would meet the DEI definition.

The Florida legislation also voids any current DEI policies and programs that are currently in place, removes elected officials from office who violate the prohibition, and authorizes 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.

There is also the possibility that the federal government, state government and/or individuals may bring action against Leon County for violating various existing federal and/or state laws depending on the programs to be implemented as provided in the proposed charter amendment. For example, the state and federal fair housing laws generally prohibit housing programs based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, familial status, disability, or age.

Therefore, the adoption of the proposed charter amendment is not recommended as it could violate established federal law, be prohibited by pending Florida legislation, and immediately jeopardize federal funding recently awarded to the County. However, should the Committee wish to recommend the proposed amendment, proposed ballot title and ballot are provided in Table #1 that would meet the statutorily required word count limit. The ballot title is limited to 15 words, and the ballot language is limited to 75 words.

Table #1. Proposed Ballot Title and Ballot Language

Proposed Ballot Title
Leon County Charter Amendment Addressing Persistent Disparities from Historic Public Policy Decisions
Proposed Ballot Language
Shall the Leon County Charter be amended to require the County to assess and address persistent disparities resulting from historic public policy decisions such as slavery and racial segregation, by requiring the County to conduct historical impact audits; authorize the establishment a Community Restoration Fund dedicated solely to support programs, services, and investments that benefit individuals and/or communities that experienced disparities from historic public policy decisions; and provide for other benefits?

A simple majority is needed to recommend a charter amendment to the Board of County Commissioners. A status report on the Committee’s recommendation(s) will be provided to the Board at its regularly scheduled meeting on March 10, 2026. Upon approval by a simple majority of the Board, public hearings will be scheduled in June or July 2026, for the Committee to take public input and formally consider the proposed Charter amendments. The outcome of the public hearings will be reflected in the Committee’s final report to the Board in August 2026.

As stated earlier, no county charters in Florida include language to assess and address disparities from historic public policies since charters generally address large organizational issues focused on the authority, structure, and power of county government. The County Commission actively addresses poverty and inequity through its policies, programming, and budgetary decisions without

the need for a charter change. Therefore, a charter amendment to require the County to assess and address persistent disparities resulting from historic public policy decisions is not recommended.

On February 5, 2026, the Committee approve a proposed charter amendment for recommendation to the Board revising the Preamble to reflect the esteemed humanity among residents of Leon County 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, hereby affirm the esteemed humanity of all residents of Leon County. We recognize in every person a shared dignity, not granted by government, but inherent and deserving of consideration in our public affairs. ~~and~~ In order to empower the people of this County to make changes in their own government, we do ordain and establish this Home Rule Charter for Leon County, Florida.

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. It does not delineate specific structures, authorities, policies, or provision of services for the county government. Therefore, the Committee may determine recent actions taken to recommend a proposed charter amendment revising the Preamble sufficiently reflects the County’s commitment to addressing poverty and inequity in the community.

In addition to the proposed charter amendment to the Preamble, the Committee may wish to provide a policy recommendation, as shown in Table #2, to encourage the continuation of the County’s long-standing commitment to addressing poverty through the utilization of empirical data, active engagement, significant investment, and critical programming in partnership with local stakeholders that enhance the quality of life and economic prosperity of citizens and neighborhoods that have historically experienced poverty and inequities.

Table #2. Draft Policy Recommendation to Board of County Commissioners

Draft Policy Recommendation
The Leon County Citizen Charter Review Committee encourages the Board of County Commissioners to continue Leon County’s long-standing commitment to addressing poverty in the community through the utilization of empirical data, active engagement, significant investment, and critical programming in partnership with local stakeholders that enhance the quality of life and economic prosperity of citizens and neighborhoods that have historically experienced poverty and inequities.

The proposed policy recommendation would be included in the status report on the Committee's actions to be presented to the Board in March 2026 as well as the Committee's Final Report to be presented in August 2026.

Options:

1. Approve a the draft recommendation encouraging the Board to continue the County's long-standing commitment to addressing poverty and inequities in the community.
2. Approve the proposed charter amendment for recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners to address persistent disparities resulting from historic public policy decisions in the Leon County Charter (Attachment #1).
3. Committee direction.

Recommendation:

Option #1

Attachments:

1. Proposed Charter Amendment on Addressing Persistent Disparities Resulting from Historic Public Policy Decisions
2. January 22, 2026 Citizen Charter Review Committee Agenda Item on Addressing Poverty and Racial Inequity in the County Charter
3. Harmful Public Policy and Charter Reform Handout provided by Dr. Bruce Strouble

Proposed Charter Amendment

Sec. 1.XX – Addressing Persistent Disparities Resulting From Historic Public Policy Decisions

- (1) The County shall assess and address persistent disparities resulting from historic public policy decisions as provided for in this section.
- (2) Definitions.
 - (A) Persistent disparities shall mean individuals or communities whose ancestors were subjected to historic policy decisions as described in Section 1.XX (2)(B) that resulted in disenfranchisement and/or disinvestment based on race.
 - (B) Historic Policy Decisions shall mean any of the following government-imposed policies and/or conditions:
 - a. Forced or compulsory labor systems in effect prior to 1865;
 - b. Post-Emancipation systems of coerced labor, including debt peonage and convict leasing;
 - c. Legally mandated racial segregation in housing, education, health care, transportation, employment, or public services;
 - d. Exclusionary zoning, land use restrictions, or racially restrictive covenants enforced or sanctioned by Leon County;
 - e. Mid-century urban renewal, clearance, or redevelopment programs that displaced communities based on racial criteria under a then-existing Leon County policy; and
 - f. Documented denial of access to publicly funded services by Leon County on the basis of statutory racial classifications.
 - (C) Restoration Activities shall mean County actions including programs, services, and investments that repair or mitigate persistent disparities directly traceable to the policies described in Section 1.XX (2)(B).
- (3) Historic Impact Audit
 - (A) The County shall conduct a historical impact audit every five (5) years to:
 - a. Determine which individuals and/or communities meet the criteria in Section 1.XX (2)(A);
 - b. Document the specific policies that caused long-term inequities;
 - c. Assess current and persistent disparities linked to those policies;
 - d. Provide recommendations for targeted restoration activities.

(4) Community Restoration Fund

(A) The County Commission may establish a Community Restoration Fund dedicated solely to support Restoration Activities that benefit individuals and communities identified under Section 1.XX (2)(A). Eligible activities include:

- a. Multi-generational housing stability
- b. Displacement prevention
- c. Community land stewardship
- d. Environmental health remediation
- e. Restoration of cultural and historical sites
- f. Community wealth-building initiatives
- g. Health and educational infrastructure
- h. Neighborhood reinvestment in historically displaced areas

(5) Integration with Planning and Budgeting

(A) Findings from Historical Impact Audits shall be incorporated into:

- a. Capital improvement planning
- b. Neighborhood planning
- c. Housing strategies
- d. Environmental and resilience planning

(6) Priority Access to County-owned Land

(A) The County may grant priority access to County-owned land through leasing, stewardship agreements, or community trusts to individuals or communities that meet the criteria in Section 1.XX (2)(A) for the following:

- a. Housing
- b. Community agriculture
- c. Cooperatives
- d. Cultural preservation
- e. Economic development
- f. Memorial or restorative purposes

(7) Implementation and Compliance

- (A) The Board of County Commissioners shall enact an ordinance defining the criteria for individual and/or community eligibility, processes for verifying eligibility, structures for community participation in decision-making, and safeguards to ensure restoration activities remain targeted to individuals or communities under Section 1.XX (2)(A).

Proposed Ballot Title

Leon County Charter Amendment Addressing Persistent Disparities from Historic Public Policy Decisions

Proposed Ballot Language

Shall the Leon County Charter be amended to require the County to assess and address persistent disparities resulting from historic public policy decisions such as slavery and racial segregation, by requiring the County to conduct historical impact audits; authorize the establishment a Community Restoration Fund dedicated solely to support programs, services, and investments that benefit individuals and/or communities that experienced racial disparities from historic public policy decisions; and provide for other benefits?

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

Review and Approval:	Vincent S. Long, County Administrator
Department / Division Review:	Ken Morris, Assistant County Administrator Shington Lamy, Assistant County Administrator
Lead Staff / Project Team:	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

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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:

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- 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.

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- 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.

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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

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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

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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.

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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 starkest 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.¹

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

After Emancipation, Black residents were pushed into **sharecropping, debt peonage, and convict leasing**, with the Leon County sheriff leasing prisoners to private companies until 1923.³

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.ashevilenc.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_25/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-horizontes-food-security-policy/>
- **Cape Town, South Africa** – Land restoration to remedy apartheid-era displacement. https://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/UNSWLawJl/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.

****ARTICLE X. (Sample)**

Restoring Communities Impacted by Historic Government-Imposed Structural Exclusion**

Section 1. Purpose and Intent.

Leon County recognizes that specific communities within the County continue to experience persistent inequities directly traceable to public policies, including compulsory labor systems, legally mandated segregation, exclusionary housing practices, discriminatory land use decisions, and state-sanctioned displacement, that were applied to specific populations under prior law.

The intent of this Article is to:

1. acknowledge these historic impacts;
2. identify communities whose long-term inequities stem directly from these policies;
3. authorize County action to mitigate those impacts; and
4. support the restoration, stabilization, and advancement of affected communities.

Section 1A. Alignment With Prior County Acknowledgment.

This Article is adopted in furtherance of the Board of County Commissioners' Resolution of February 20, 2024, in which the County formally acknowledged and apologized for the enslavement, segregation, displacement, and state-sanctioned exclusion of African Americans in Leon County.

In that Resolution, the Board recognized the historic systems of slavery, Jim Crow laws, racial segregation, discriminatory land use and redevelopment practices, the destruction of communities such as Smokey Hollow, and the denial of equal access to public services. The Board affirmed its commitment to eliminate the lingering effects of these policies and to uphold the principle that all people are created equal and endowed with inalienable rights.

This Article provides the structural framework necessary for the County to carry out the commitments expressed in that Resolution by identifying communities whose inequities stem directly from those historic public policies and authorizing targeted restoration efforts designed to mitigate the continuing impacts of those harms.

Section 2. Definitions.

(a) “Historically Impacted Communities.”

Cohesive communities whose **ancestors or long-term members** were subjected to any of the following government-imposed conditions within Leon County:

1. forced or compulsory labor systems in effect prior to 1865;
2. post-Emancipation systems of coerced labor, including debt peonage and convict leasing;
3. legally mandated racial segregation in housing, education, health care, transportation, employment, or public services;
4. exclusionary zoning, land use restrictions, or racially restrictive covenants enforced or sanctioned by government;
5. mid-century urban renewal, clearance, or redevelopment programs that displaced communities based on racial criteria under the then-existing policy;
6. documented denial of access to publicly funded services on the basis of statutory racial classifications.

A community must demonstrate longstanding cultural, familial, or historical continuity within Leon County during the time such policies were in force.

This is **not** an individual-level designation; it applies to **multi-generational communities**, not transient populations.

(b) “Restoration Activities.”

County actions that repair or mitigate inequities directly traceable to the policies described in Section 2(a).

Section 3. Historical Impact Audit.

The County shall conduct a Historical Impact Audit every five years to:

1. determine which communities meet the criteria in Section 2(a);
2. document the specific policies that caused long-term inequities;
3. assess current disparities linked to those policies;
4. provide recommendations for targeted restoration activities.

Audit findings must be publicly accessible.

Section 4. Community Restoration Fund.

The County Commission may establish a Community Restoration Fund dedicated solely to supporting Restoration Activities that benefit communities identified under Section 2(a). Eligible activities include:

- multi-generational housing stability
- displacement prevention
- community land stewardship
- environmental health remediation
- restoration of cultural and historical sites
- community wealth-building initiatives
- health and educational infrastructure
- neighborhood reinvestment in historically displaced areas

Funds cannot be diverted to communities or populations not identified as Historically Impacted.

Section 5. Priority Access to County-Owned Land.

The County may grant priority access to County-owned land—through leasing, stewardship agreements, or community trusts—to **Historically Impacted Communities** for:

- housing
- community agriculture
- cooperatives
- cultural preservation
- economic development
- memorial or restorative purposes

All actions must comply with Florida Statutes regarding public lands.

Section 6. Integration with Planning and Budgeting.

Findings from Historical Impact Audits shall be incorporated into:

- capital improvement planning
- neighborhood planning
- housing strategies
- environmental and resilience planning

- budget proposals

County actions in these areas must demonstrate efforts to mitigate disparities documented through the Audit.

Section 7. Implementation and Compliance.

The County Commission shall enact ordinances defining:

- criteria for community eligibility,
- processes for verifying multi-generational continuity,
- structures for community participation in decision-making,
- and safeguards to ensure benefits remain targeted to communities identified under Section 2(a).

Restoring Communities Impacted by Harmful Public Policy

Substantive Responses to Common Objections

1. “I didn’t own slaves—why am I responsible?”

Response: *This Article assigns responsibility to the Leon County government, not individuals. Governments routinely repair harms created by their own policies—Japanese-American internment reparations, court-ordered desegregation, and local restoration programs in places like Evanston and Asheville. This isn’t about personal guilt; it’s about institutional accountability*

2. “This is unconstitutional or reverse discrimination.”

Response: *The proposal uses race-neutral, historically grounded criteria, which courts consistently uphold when the government created the harm, the remedy matches the harm, and the criteria track policy lineage rather than racial identity. Evanston, Asheville, and California’s AB 3121 provide clear modern examples of legally sound approaches*

3. “Taxpayers shouldn’t pay for 100-year-old mistakes.”

Response: Taxpayers already pay for the consequences: concentrated poverty, higher emergency and policing costs, depressed property values, and failing infrastructure in neglected neighborhoods. Restoration lowers costs over time and strengthens the local tax base

4. “Everyone struggles—why focus on certain communities?”

Response: *This article addresses government-produced inequity, not general hardship. Slavery, segregation, redlining, convict leasing, and urban renewal harmed specific multi-generational communities in Leon County. Constitutional law requires narrow tailoring—this Article meets that requirement*

5. “This will open the door to endless claims.”

Response: *Eligibility is limited to specific policy eras, documented harms, and communities with multi-generational continuity in Leon County. The framework is tightly bound and historically defined.*

6. “This sounds like reparations.”

Response: *The article does not provide individual cash payments, use racial criteria, or redistribute wealth. It invests in infrastructure, environmental cleanup, housing stability, cultural restoration, community land access, and neighborhood revitalization. This is public-purpose restoration, not personal compensation*

7. “Florida prohibits race-based programs.”

Response: *Eligibility is based on exposure to historically documented public policies: compulsory labor before 1865, convict leasing and Jim Crow statutes, redlining and displacement, and segregated public services. These policies applied overwhelmingly to Black residents, without the Article ever mentioning race. It is legally safe and functionally precise*

8. “Why dredge up the past?”

Response: *The past is still with us. Disparities in Leon County map directly onto historic policy decisions: 32304 remains the poorest ZIP code in Florida, the Southside carries environmental burdens, Frenchtown and Smokey Hollow bear the scars of displacement, and life expectancy varies by more than ten years across neighborhoods. If the impact remains, the duty remains*

9. “Won’t this divide the community?”

Response: The reality is the opposite. Restoration reduces division by stabilizing neighborhoods, reducing inequity, and strengthening the economy—mirroring successful models in Toronto, Belo Horizonte, and Asheville

10. “Let nonprofits handle this.”

Response: *Nonprofits didn’t create slavery, Black Codes, segregation, redlining, exclusionary zoning, environmental targeting, or urban renewal displacement. The government created these harms, and therefore, the government is best suited to repair said harms*