

Preface

Polk Vision was formed in 2003 to bring residents together with government and community leaders to examine and address the issues we face in Polk County. A diverse 26-person Steering Committee hired Henry Luke from Jacksonville, Florida to facilitate the visioning process and Colleen Burton as the organization's Executive Director.

Phase I of Polk Vision began in January 2004 with a series of 16 focus groups followed by 5 community meetings in March. These meetings were held to gain insight into perceived Polk County strengths and weaknesses. At these meetings over 700 county residents identified issues important to their lives and their community.

Due to the geographic expanse of Polk County, five Task Forces were created to represent the region. These Task Forces, formed with over 390 community stakeholders, met in Winter Haven, Lake Wales, Bartow, Haines City and Lakeland to review the issues identified in the focus groups and community meetings. The result of their collaboration is a shared Vision of what Polk County citizens want their community to be in the next 5 to 20 years. The Vision sets priorities with goals and strategies in six foundation areas (Quality of Life, Education, Infrastructure, Government, Economic Development, and Private Sector Leadership) that will enhance the quality of life in Polk County for years to come.

During the summer of 2004, the Vision was presented to the residents of Polk County for review and input. The members of the Polk Vision Steering Committee revised the draft Vision with input received from the community and adopted the final Vision on August 2, 2004.

The Polk Vision process has moved into Phase II, which includes the implementation of Strategies and development of Action Steps. Foundation Teams have been established in each of the six foundation areas. A Benchmark Team has also been established to measure the progress of all efforts.

Polk Vision continues to recruit Vision Partners to work with the Foundation and Benchmark teams. It will take the community, in partnership with public and private organizations, working together to make the Vision a reality.

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POLK COUNTY CASE FOR CHANGE

The *POLK VISION* Task Force of over 390 people considered the following issues or trends, the input from Focus Groups and Community Meetings, other data and their experience in developing the *POLK VISION*.

1. THE INFRASTRUCTURE GAP

In the Polk County government's 2003-2004 budget, updated July 2004, there was \$372.6 million in un-funded projects for construction of roads, parks and recreation facilities, water and sewer, and other infrastructure. This is the un-funded capital improvement plan (CIP). This was only for projects with enough planning for a cost estimate. The total un-funded capital improvements required to maintain and enhance the Polk overall quality of life was a higher, but unknown, number.

THE INFRASTRUCTURE GAP

<u>Un-funded Capital Improvements</u>	<u>Description</u>
\$227,843,000	Transportation/Engineering
\$121,535,470	Administration Services
\$12,564,054	Community Services/Parks and Recreation
\$8,590,000	Environmental Services-Natural Resources
\$2,050,000	Management Information Systems
\$372,582,524	Sub-total - Polk County Government un-funded CIP FY 2003/2004 for projects with enough planning for cost estimates
?	Un-funded Polk County Government CIP without cost estimates
?	Total un-funded CIP for County Government
?	Education un-funded CIP - all levels County and State
?	Cities un-funded CIP
?	State - Polk County un-funded CIP
?	Library un-funded CIP
?	TOTAL UN-FUNDED CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT

Source: Polk County 2003-2004 Budget

Clearly growth in Polk County is not paying for itself. Someone said that there is a self-correcting mechanism at work. When growth creates a large enough gap in roads, parks and recreation facilities, water and sewer, and other infrastructure, then growth will slow down or stop. That is true, but do Polk County residents want to manage growth through this self-correction mechanism?

Single-family housing building permits from 1980-1999 averaged 2,249¹ per year. However from 1999-2003, they increased from 2,321 to 5,917. This was a bubble housing boom that was unsupported by job growth. This housing boom helped offset the effects of the national job recession in Polk County in 2001-2003. Increasing impact fees to pay for infrastructure costs and other costs required for housing to pay its own way may cause a slow down in housing growth.

The impact of this decline should be offset by the rebound in the national economy and the impact of economic development efforts in Polk County.

The infrastructure gap is not a surprise. In 1999, the Florida Stewardship Foundation, Inc. prepared a report, "The Economics of Land Uses in Polk Country." They recommended

¹ Source: Polk County Government

creating an "activity-based cost accounting/planning" computer model to help Polk County develop a sustainable mix of housing values and growth rates and business growth rates. This study referred to a February 1987 study that found that growth was not paying for itself.

In a 1996 study, Dr. Hank Fishkind² recommended setting up a Municipal Service Benefit Unit (MSBU) in the Four-Corners area to pay for \$70 million of infrastructure needed by anticipated development. This would have allowed new construction to pay for the \$70 million infrastructure. The recommendation was rejected and the new construction is there without the needed infrastructure.

The *POLK VISION* acknowledges an existing infrastructure gap which must be eliminated and that future growth must pay for itself, both initial cost of infrastructure and annual operating cost.

2. TAX BASE

Polk's "taxable values per resident" in 2002 was \$36,054³, ranking Polk 19th among the 23 Florida Counties with a population over 180,000. From 1996 to 2002, Polk's "taxable values per resident increased at an annual rate of 4.6% compared to Florida's 5.9%. **As a result, Polk's tax base per resident was 73.3% of Florida's in 1996, 70.8% in 1999 and 68% in 2002.** If the gap between Polk's and Florida's "taxable values per resident" continues to increase, Polk County's competitive position within Florida will decline for Quality of Life, Education, Infrastructure, and Economic Development.

As a result of the low tax base with resulting service and infrastructure gaps, the county residents approved two referendums for tax increases in 2003-2004: ½ ¢ sales tax for a school construction impact fee, and ½ ¢ sales tax for indigent healthcare. If the gap in tax base per resident between Polk County and Florida continues to increase, there will likely continue to be a need for tax increases and/or cuts in services.

Polk County's low tax base per resident results from: 1) the residential tax base per resident in 2002 was \$17,592, only 49.6% of Florida's \$35,487, and 2) slow growth in Polk's business taxable values per resident of only 2.7% per year from 1999-2002 and a 2.4% decline in 2003. Polk's preliminary data for 2004 is available but not included because Florida's data is not available.

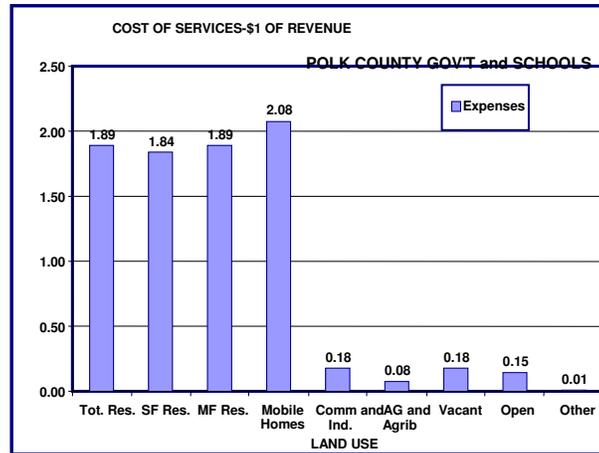
The *POLK VISION* is based on reversing the downward trend of Polk County's taxable values as a percentage of Florida's taxable values.

3. BUSINESS TAX BASE SUBSIDIZES RESIDENTIAL

Historically the residential tax base does not generate enough taxes to cover the cost of residential services. The deficit is made up from taxes from the business tax base, which produces a surplus of income over costs. The size of the problem depends on the average value of the historic housing base, mix/value of new housing being added currently and business growth. See "The Economics of Land Uses in Polk County, Florida" prepared in 1999 by the Florida Stewardship Foundation, Inc.-Boca Raton, Florida for more information on this subject. In this study, they determined that residential property cost \$1.89 in services for every \$1.00 in income. Business property cost \$0.18 in services for every \$1.00 in income to the county government and school board. **This five-year old study needs to be updated to reflect current conditions and to implement two of their recommendations: 1) develop the activity-based cost accounting/planning model and, 2) determine the average break-even value for new housing.**

² Minutes and tape recording of Dr. Fishkind's 7/23/96 presentation to the Polk County Commission.

³ Florida Department of Revenue web site, Polk County Tax Assessor and U.S. Census



Source: "The Economics of Land Use in Polk County, FL" 1999 by the Florida Stewardship Foundation, Inc.

The *POLK VISION* is based on developing a model that will result in a sustainable mix of residential and business growth.

4. BEDROOM COMMUNITY TREND

In 2000, 31,598⁴ Polk County residents worked outside the county and 17,602 people living outside the county commuted into the county for work. The 13,996 net out-commuters tend to spend their money outside the county, are not available to volunteer and their commute may cause stress on their families. The business subsidy for the out-commuting jobs that helps pay for residential cost is spent in another county and Polk County residents have to provide the subsidy for housing in Polk County.

The *POLK VISION* is based on reversing the trend of becoming a bedroom community.

5. RETIREMENT COMMUNITY

In 2000, the Polk County working age/retirement age ratio was 3.0 (or 3 working age people for each retirement age person),⁵ Florida's was 3.3 and the U.S.'s was 4.7. The retirement of the baby boomers will place additional stress on this ratio. With Polk County's low working age/retirement age ratio, low housing taxable value per resident at 49.6%⁶ of Florida's in 2002 and low wealth income per capita, as defined in Case for Change #6, at 67.7%⁷ of Florida's in 2002, some Polk County retirees are probably at risk of financial stress.

The *POLK VISION* is based on increasing the working age/retirement age ratio, relative to Florida's ratio, which will help spread the cost of the safety net risk over a broader base.

6. RELATIVE STANDARD OF LIVING

Polk County's per capita income as a percentage of the United States has declined since 1980, from 89.7%⁸ in 1980 to 83.4% in 2002. Per Capita Income is defined as total income of county residents divided by total population of the county. Income includes earnings from work, wealth earnings from dividends, interest and rent, and transfer payments from the government such as welfare and social security.

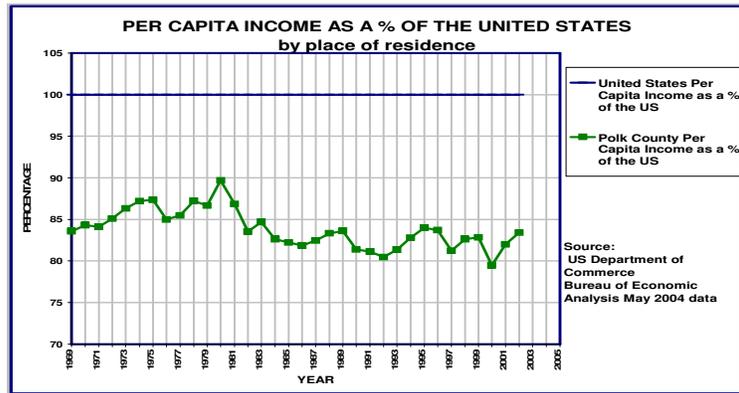
⁴ U.S. Census 2000

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Florida Department of Revenue web site, Polk County Tax Assessor and U.S. Census

⁷ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis

⁸ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis



The *POLK VISION* is based on reversing this trend of declining per capita income as a percentage of U.S. per capita income, resulting in residents having more income to spend.

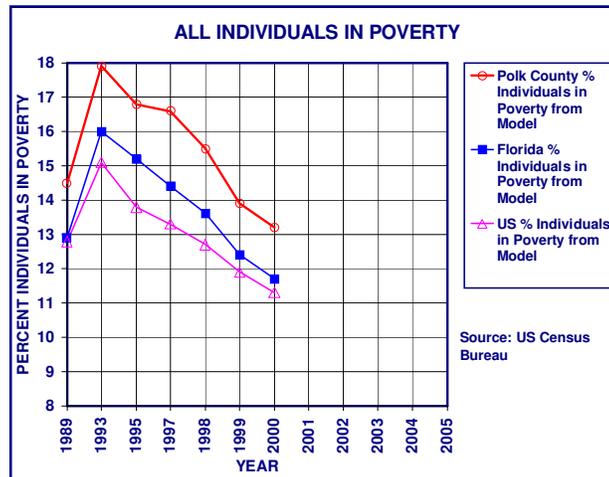
7. JOB GROWTH

From 1990-2003, in Polk County, the average annual increase in the number of jobs on payrolls increased by 2,541⁹ jobs per year. This slow growth in jobs and the quality of the jobs not only resulted in a lower tax base, but out-commuting of our residents to jobs in Tampa and Orlando and exporting our best educated young people.

The *POLK VISION* is based on increasing the job growth and emphasizing increasing earnings per job.

8. POVERTY

During the 1990's, Polk County's poverty rate was about 2% above the Florida or U.S. rates, based on the U.S. Census Model estimates.



The *POLK VISION* is based on decreasing the poverty rates.

9. EDUCATION

In 2002-2003, the Polk County School System's graduation rate was 65.7% compared to Florida's 69.0%.¹⁰ In 2003, 32% of 10th graders were reading at grade level compared to Florida's 36%.

In the 2000 Census, Polk's 25 and over residents had 41%¹¹ with "some college or a higher degree" compared to the U.S. at 51.7% and 14.9% had a "Bachelor's degree or higher" compared to the U.S. at 24.4%.

⁹ Central Florida Development Council, Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation

¹⁰ Florida Department of Education web site

The *POLK VISION* is based on dramatically improving education and its measurable outcomes.

10. STABLE FAMILIES AND MARRIAGES

In 2002, Polk was the highest in two measurements¹² of marriage instability among the 23 Florida counties with a population over 180,000. Polk's "Marriage Dissolutions as a Percentage of Marriages" was 70.1%, Duval's at #2 was 68.3% and Florida's was 54.1%. Polk's percentage of "Live Births to Unwed Mothers" was 45.6%, St. Lucie's was #2 at 45.3% and Florida's was 39.4%.

The percentage of Polk "Live Births to Unwed Mothers" age 18 or under was 11.3% in 1997 and declined to 8.6% in 2002.

The poverty rate for Polk "Families with Female Householder, no Husband Present" was 28.6% in the 2000 U.S. Census or 5 times the rate for the remaining families at 5.7%. There were 22,606 Polk "children under 18 years" in poverty. This is 37% of the total individuals in poverty and 3.3 times the 6,934 "individuals 65 and over" in poverty.

The *POLK VISION* is based on improving family and marriage stability.

11. RACIAL HARMONY

In the 2000 Census, the Black/African American population percent was 13.5%, Hispanic or Latino was 9.5% and other minorities was 6.8% percent, for a total minority population of 29.8%. Based on input from throughout the county, there is a need and desire for improvement in racial harmony.

The *POLK VISION* is based on improving racial harmony and involving more minorities in Polk Vision implementation.

¹¹ U.S. Census 2000

¹² Florida Vital Statistics web site

PRIORITY ISSUES IN 2004

Five Community Meetings were held on 3/4/04-Haines City, 3/8/04-Lakeland, 3/10/04-Bartow, 3/16/04-Lake Wales, and 3/18/04-Winter Haven. The participants in these meetings selected their Top Ten Priority issues to be addressed in the Vision Process.

Priority Issues

Education
Economic Development
(20)
Growth Management/Infrastructure
Government Reform/Accountability/Services
Quality of Life
Health/Family Services/Social Services/Human Services
Environmental
Youth Issues
Cultural Diversity
Culture and the Arts

Addressed In (page #)

Education (13)
Economic Development

Infrastructure (22)
Government (26)
Quality of Life (29)
Quality of Life (29)
Infrastructure (22)
Quality of Life (29)
Quality of Life (29)
Quality of Life (29)

At the five March 2004 Community Meetings, the participants identified 619 unique issues to be considered by the Vision Task Force. The 619 issues were summarized and ranked by the groups, then combined together to produce the top ten issues. The 619 issues were sorted into the six foundations and provided to the Vision Task Force as input during the discussion on each foundation in April and May 2004. The Vision Task Force also considered input from over 350 Focus Group participants and their own diverse experience in developing the Vision. The Vision Task Force distilled the 619 issues into 169 strategies contained in the Vision. Many of the issues discussed, but not included in the Vision, will become Action Steps during the Implementation Process.

These issues are addressed throughout the Vision and Strategies for the six interdependent foundations required to provide a comprehensive Vision for Polk County. The six foundations also provide a proven framework for the five-year Implementation Process.

LONG-TERM VISION

OUR VISION

Before 2024, Polk County:

- will have a world-class, fully integrated education system that supports the needs of a vibrant progressive community.
- will have an economic development environment that attracts quality businesses with higher paying jobs, improves productivity and retains our youth.
- will have growth management and infrastructure that protects the environment and quality of life, supports education and economic development, and is economically sustainable.
- will have a comprehensive system of government that is effective, efficient and diverse while responding to the basic needs of its citizens.
- will have a quality of life that encourages diverse backgrounds to live in harmony while developing physically, spiritually, mentally, and culturally within a healthy and safe environment.
- will have private sector leadership that drives the partnership with government and citizens in ensuring that Polk County is a premiere place to live, learn, work and play.

OUR CORE VALUES

Core values include but are not limited to the following character traits that guide in daily decisions. These were the top core values determined by a majority of the Vision Task Force.

Integrity	Education
Faith in God	Responsibility
Sense of Community	Family Values

KEY BENCHMARKS

The Key Benchmarks will be used to measure *POLK VISION*'s progress each year. There will be Strategy Benchmarks developed by Vision Partners that will also be measured on an annual basis. Achieving the Benchmarks will require our working together in an unprecedented way on the strategies in the six interdependent Foundations: Education, Quality of Life, Economic Development, Infrastructure, Government and Private Sector Leadership. *POLK VISION* will identify the future we want for Polk County. The Benchmarks will tell us each year: a) when we are successful and can celebrate; or b) when we fall short of the Benchmarks and the Vision Partners need to review, revise and refocus their action steps to accomplish the strategies.

1. EDUCATION

- a. **Higher Education - Increase the percentage of Polk adults 25 and over with a "Bachelor's degree" from 14.9% to the U.S. average (24.4%¹³ in 2000) by 2020.**
- b. **Skills – Training - Increase the percentage of Polk adults 25 and over with "some college or a higher degree" from 41%¹⁴ in 2000 to the U.S. average (51.7% in 2000) by 2010. This will require getting about 6,500 Polk adults per year without any college or technical training to complete at least one college or technical level course.**

¹³ U.S. Census 2000

¹⁴ Ibid

c. **Pre-K-12 - Increase the graduation rate.** *In 2002-2003, the graduation rate was 65.7%¹⁵. Increase the percentage of Polk students reading on/or above grade level at the 10th grade. In 2003, 32%¹⁶ were reading at the 10th grade level. Increase the percentage of children ready to enter Kindergarten. The Polk Vision Benchmark Team, Education Foundation Team and Education Vision Partners will set the measurements for these three benchmarks before February 2005 with the advice of the new school superintendent.*

2. JOB GROWTH AND BUSINESS INVESTMENT

a. **Ensure that higher income jobs are being created and higher income retirees are attracted to Polk County by increasing the Polk County per capita income as a percentage of the United States to 90% before 2024.** *In 1980, the Polk County per capita income was 89.7%¹⁷ and in 2002, was 83.4%. See Scenario # 1¹⁸.*

b. **Achieve higher business job growth with a mix of higher paying jobs that help retain our young people reverse the trend of out-commuting. Provide 7,000 net new jobs per year (see table below). From 1990 to 2003, Polk County produced 2,541¹⁹ average annual net new jobs with a high of 6,891 in 1994 and a low of (4,625) in 1991.**

	ANNUAL INCREASE
Net in-migration based on 2002 U.S. Census estimate of 5,471 total reduced for working age	3,130
Reduce net out-commuting to zero in ten years	1,400
Attract Polk young people with degrees back to Polk	1,443
Annual increase in age 25 minus age 65 (2005 to 2010)	<u>1,027</u>
TOTAL	7,000

Increase the average earnings per job by at least 0.5% above the higher of the Florida or U.S. percentage annual increase. This increase in earnings per job will be influenced by not only new jobs added, but increased productivity for existing jobs that allows earnings per job to increase at a higher percentage than the U.S. or Florida. From 1990 to 2002, the Polk County average annual wage increase was 3.56%²⁰, Florida's was 3.65% and the United States was 3.77%.

c. **Create an aggressive and competitive economic development program that results in the Polk business subsidy for residential services increasing at a faster rate. Increase the Polk business taxable value per resident by at least an annual increase of 1.0% above the Florida average. From 1999 to 2002, Polk's annual increase was 2.75%²¹ and Florida's 4.3%. In 2003, Polk declined 2.4%. See Scenario #2.**

d. **Continue existing exemptions and add highly competitive incentives and exemptions for higher-paying, higher-skills jobs. Currently, the Polk Economic Development Exemption is zero²². See Scenario #8.**

¹⁵ Florida Department of Education web site

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis

¹⁸ Hereafter, each reference to Scenarios refers to Polk Vision Scenarios available at www.polkvision.com

¹⁹ Central Florida Development Council, Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Florida Department of Revenue web site, Polk County Tax Assessor and U.S. Census

²² Polk County Tax Assessor

e. Begin to narrow the tax base gap with Florida that could result in increasing services and cutting the tax rate. *In 1996, the total Polk Taxable Values per Resident was 73.3% of Florida's and 68.0%²³ in 2002. Increase the Polk tax base percentage of Florida by 1% per year. See Scenario #3.*

f. Reverse the trend toward becoming a bedroom community. *From 1981 to 2002, the net earnings of "out-commuters minus in-commuters" as a percentage of Polk "residents" earnings from work" increased at 0.78%²⁴ per year. Stop the trend to become a bedroom community and return Polk to a net importer of workers within ten years. See Scenario #5.*

g. Commit to increase the working age/retirement age ratio relative to Florida's and increase the wealth of residents. Polk's working age/retirement age ratio will be at or above the Florida average by 2015. *The Polk working age-retirement age was 3.0²⁵ in 2000, Florida was 3.3 and the U.S. was 4.7. Increase Polk's wealth component 1% a year as a percentage of Florida. The Polk wealth component of per capita income was \$4,995²⁶ in 2002 (67.7% of Florida), Florida's was \$7,376, and the U.S. was \$5,384.*

3. INFRASTRUCTURE

a. Eliminate infrastructure existing gaps over a 10-year period and provide infrastructure for growth as it occurs (*See Scenario #14*). The measurement will be the total un-funded infrastructure capital improvements being reduced to zero by 2014.

b. Total new residential and business growth each year will be expected to pay for the incremental costs associated with infrastructure and annual operation cost of such growth (*See Scenario #4*). The measurement will be determined as a by-product of a land-use planning model with "activity based cost accounting." This model will lead to a sustainable and balanced comprehensive land use plan where residential growth's infrastructure and annual operation cost is paid for on a current basis.

4. STABLE MARRIAGES AND FAMILIES

Provide incentives, encouragement and support that result in stable, healthy, safe marriages and families.

By 2014, reduce the percentage of births to unwed mothers and the rate of births to mothers under age 18 to consistently below the state average.

5. POVERTY

By 2015, decrease the percentage of individuals in poverty to consistently be below the Florida and/or U.S. percentage using the U.S. Census Poverty Model estimates. *During the 1990's, Polk's poverty rate for all individuals was about 2.0%²⁸ above both the Florida and U.S. rates, from the U.S. Census Poverty Model estimates. See Scenario #10.*

²³ Florida Department of Revenue web site, Polk County Tax Assessor and U.S. Census

²⁴ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis

²⁵ U.S. Census 2000

²⁶ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis

²⁸ U.S. Census web site

6. ARTS AND CULTURE

Polk will be nationally ranked for arts and culture in the upper ¼ of metro areas before 2024. Increase the economic impact of arts and culture by more than 10% a year.

7. RACIAL HARMONY, DIVERSITY and OPPORTUNITY

a. In all of the six foundations and strategies of Polk Vision, we will be committed to racial harmony, diversity and opportunity for everyone in Polk County.

b. Strategies throughout the six foundations will impact racial harmony, diversity and opportunity for everyone in Polk County over the long-term. We will measure the change in attitudes resulting from the implementation of these many strategies by having a regular scientific attitude survey that will be the measurement for changes in racial harmony (after the initial survey in 2005, expected annual increments of improvement in key indicators will be established).

OUR MID-TERM STRATEGIES

STRATEGIES

Interdependent Building Blocks that Support Our Long-Term Vision

I.

Education Foundation

II.

Economic Development Foundation

III.

Infrastructure Foundation

IV.

Government Foundation

V.

Quality of Life Foundation

VI.

Private Sector Leadership Foundation

I. EDUCATION

VISION

Before 2024, Polk County will have a world-class, fully integrated education system that supports the needs of a vibrant progressive community.

STRATEGIES:

A. Higher Education and Skills Training

1. Develop²⁹ partnerships between higher education and employers that encourage specialized training, internships, cooperative education and meet the needs of local business. Provide linkage between higher education and businesses to place students in Polk after graduation.

Polk County's colleges and universities currently include:

Florida Southern College

Keiser College

Polk Community College

Southeastern College

University of South Florida Lakeland

Warner Southern College

Webber International University

Webster University

Traviss and Ridge Technical Centers

2. Develop USF Lakeland's new campus with a ground breaking by 2007 on a first phase, \$190 million campus for 10,000 students. To meet this schedule, \$50 to \$100 million must be committed by the Florida legislature by the spring of 2007. The Master plan is for 15,000 students in 20 years. USF Lakeland's vision is to serve the Polk County region, help drive economic development, provide a comprehensive offering of courses from freshman level to PhD, meet the needs of regional employers, and provide dorms and a full campus experience. USF Lakeland will have a research component that partners with businesses in the adjacent research park and includes computer science and engineering.

3. Support the efforts of Polk Community College to:

- a. Secure State funding to construct the state-approved campuses or centers in Northeast Polk and other areas to improve access to working adults and recent high school graduates.**
- b. Provide new and expanded programs to provide graduates for high skill/high wage jobs in healthcare (registered nurses and other professions), information technology, and other areas of high demand.**
- c. Provide responsive business training based on national models or customized to increase the success of existing businesses and provide start-up training for new and expanding businesses.**

²⁹ The highest priority strategies are in bold type.

Strongly encourage all students to excel. Encourage students to use free time to take college courses at PCC. Create programs that excite students and include mastery of reading, English and math.

2. Encourage and expect parents to be accountable for their children’s behavior and academic success (i.e. be positive mentors for their children and be involved as a volunteer at their children’s school). But where this is not happening, ensure that each child has at least one adult mentor from faith-based institutions, civic clubs, retirees, other Polk County organizations or school-business partnerships.

3. Provide technical education and training for careers such as auto mechanics, construction, and computer science. Make this technical education and training easily accessible in career academies in all parts of the county beginning at the 9th grade. Increase the understanding of the value and opportunities of such career training (formally called vocation training). Develop strong partnerships between the school system and businesses for technical education, skills training and apprenticeships.

4. Beginning in Pre-Kindergarten, identify students-at-risk and provide immediate remediation in reading and other parts of the curriculum. Ensure that all students read at grade level, beginning in kindergarten.

5. Provide training for our teachers and increase their quality, productivity and credentials, resulting in higher pay. Recruit teachers who are proven and have more experience. Recruit retired teachers to mentor new teachers.

6. Reading will be a countywide focus. Homes, businesses, civic organizations, and churches will join hands with schools in promoting reading. Struggling readers at any level will have opportunities for intense, effective instruction (studies are now showing that even our students who read at grade level upon graduation are not reading—for any reason: information, continuous improvement, or enjoyment). An example: One Book, One New Orleans, One Future is an initiative designed to build a sense of community by encouraging the diverse city of New Orleans to read.

7. Develop a coordinated working relationship between all school systems within Polk County that enhances the opportunities for all our young people.

8. Increase the graduation rate by increasing the focus on keeping students in school and by decreasing the annual number of dropouts.

Number of Drop-outs (grades 9-12) by Racial/Ethnic Category, 2002-2003

Racial Ethnic Category	Drop-outs
White, Non-Hispanic	609
Black, Non-Hispanic	209
Hispanic	174
Asian/Pacific Islander	10
American Indian/Alaskan Native	1
Multiracial	6
TOTAL	1,009
DOE Student Database, Survey 5 date, as of October 23, 2003	

9. Ensure that all schools are open in their neighborhoods for use by community organizations and individuals after school, in the evenings, on holidays and during the summers for sports, library use, meetings, educational classes and other activities (the county has offered to

provide the funds for insurance, lighting, and maintenance for this use). Schools will become the neighborhood educational and cultural hub.

10. Ensure the integration of recreation, arts and culture in the school curriculum. A recent summary of data from the College Board shows that students of the arts in 2002 continued to outperform their non-arts peers on the SAT (average verbal score by 53 and average math score by 31 points). Use arts to positively effect education, classroom discipline, health and nutrition.

11. Increase teacher base salaries to competitive levels. Ensure as a community that the school board, administration and teachers are accountable for student performance.

12. Increase the number of Polk County high school students that go on to college or technical school. An average of 47.4% of Polk County graduates continued their education from the last 6 graduating classes (Source: Florida department of Education web page).

13. Devise and implement a school schedule with start and end times that better suit the students' needs.

14. Implement the Polk County School System Strategic Plan.

15. Expect students to be more accountable for their education and conduct.

16. Provide quality preschool and after school care at each school as needed by parents.

17. Create equity and trust in the distribution of school resources and facilities countywide. Ensure that these resources and facilities support an excellent educational environment. Provide International Baccalaureate and other high schools of choice for students on the east side of the county.

18. Find a way to eliminate the sharp drop off of academic achievement that begins in the 6th grade and drops sharply in 9th grade. An example could be the separate 9th grade school in the Haines City High School that will open in the fall of 2004.

19. Increase the number of teachers and reduce the number of administrators.

20. Develop a science and technology high school that feeds into the higher education system.

21. Encourage employers to require a High School diploma or GED as a condition of employment for applicants over 18.

22. Hold principals at schools accountable for the success of students in their school. Provide principals with training and mentoring in skills for success.

23. Emphasize physical education and teach our young people about wellness, nutrition, exercise, disease prevention, good lifestyle decisions and character.

24. Develop a 4-year high school plan for each student at the end of the 8th grade in consultation with the student and approved by the parent. Revitalize the School to Work (STW) program.

25. Provide opportunities and support for high school dropouts to return to school to obtain their diploma.

26. Help students to learn English who don't speak English as a 1st language.

27. Support the school board administration and teachers as they maintain discipline that results in a safe learning environment.

28. Inform parents and students about the value and importance of education. In July 2002 the U.S. Census Bureau issued the following data relating education level with annual income:

Highest Education Level Achieved	Annual Income
Professional Degree	\$109,600
Doctoral Degree	\$89,400
Master's Degree	\$62,300
Bachelor's Degree	\$52,200
Associate Degree	\$38,200
Some College	\$36,800
High School Graduate	\$30,400
Not High School Graduate	\$23,400

29. Encourage entrepreneurial thinking by the school system leaders and teachers.

30. Provide comprehensive services to teen parents who are students to encourage their graduation with the skills necessary to parent and support their children.

31. Require teachers to communicate effectively with parents.

32. Treat students as individuals with respect.

33. Create an advisory council that provides counsel to the school system.

34. Improve teacher enthusiasm for promoting higher education and/or skills training for Polk County students.

35. Utilize parks and open space for educational activities.

36. Provide the same standards for facilities, teachers and curriculum for all students.

37. Emphasize that the curriculum includes students learning life skills, creative thinking, conflict resolution, and self esteem.

C. Birth-K

1. Support pre-school initiatives and reading to young children in order for students in Polk County to come to school ready to learn, and schools in Polk County to embrace those students ready to teach.

- a. Increase the number of accredited preschools and childcare in Polk County (currently only 2% of the licensed centers in Polk County are accredited).
- b. Educate the public about the importance of early childhood education.

- c. Encourage and expect parents to be accountable for their children's behavior and academic success (i.e. provide stimulating, language rich experiences and be involved as a volunteer in their children's childcare). But where that is not happening, ensure that each child has at least one adult from a quality childcare program, civic club, retiree organization, faith-based institution, other Polk County organization or school-business partnership to provide early literacy experiences.
- d. Begin during pregnancy to identify at-risk infants and provide immediate education regarding appropriate nutrition, nurture and stimulation.
- e. Begin in preschool/childcare settings to identify students at risk of school failure and provide immediate remediation in early literacy, language development, social skills and other skills required for success in school.
- f. Provide training for preschool teachers and increase their quality, productivity and credentials resulting in higher pay. Recruit teachers who are proven and have more experience. Recruit retired teachers to mentor new teachers,
- g. Early literacy will be a countywide focus. Homes, businesses, civic organizations and churches will join hands with preschools and childcare centers to promote pre-reading skills and language development. Children who enter kindergarten proficient in language and who have mastered the prerequisites for reading, learn to read and enjoy life-long reading. Children who enter kindergarten unprepared often fail and, if they learn to read at all, do not enjoy it.
- h. Strong emphasis on a "standard of care" and some type of curriculum standard for all county childcare centers, home childcare, preschools, and head start so that all children that are cared for by someone other than a parent have similar opportunities.

D. General

1. Encourage all employers to develop a list of job positions held by employees who will retire within five years. Compile this list and make it available to all levels of education and students in Polk County. We know that over 25,000 Polk County residents will reach age 65 between 2005 and 2010. Use this list, targeted job sectors, and projected job sector growth to plan for future workforce needs.
2. Provide comprehensive countywide availability of libraries. Use innovative technologies and ideas such as store-fronts and coffee shop libraries to increase accessibility.

II. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

VISION

Before 2024, Polk County will have an economic development environment that attracts quality businesses with higher paying jobs, improves productivity and retains our youth.

STRATEGIES:

1. Develop and maintain an aggressive competitively funded economic development program that creates higher paying jobs through relocation of jobs to Polk County, expansion and retention of jobs by existing employers and creation of new enterprises. Polk County, all municipalities and the private sector will cooperate proactively with a united private/public partnership for the good of Polk County. Develop partnerships with economic development organizations in the Tampa and Orlando region, state of Florida, nationally and globally to assist in creating higher paying jobs. Recognize that success on this strategy will require success on other strategies in economic development and on strategies in the five other interdependent foundations: Education, Infrastructure, Quality of Life, Government, and Private Sector leadership (because of this interdependence, strategies in these other foundations will not be repeated in economic development.)

2. Develop a countywide ‘brand’ for internal and external marketing. The brand will reflect thinking regionally within Polk County and its municipalities as the “region” and unified leadership, countywide that projects a positive, progressive image. Ensure that the “brand” has meaning and can be embraced by all segments of our community.

3. Create and retain commercial and industrial certified real estate inventory countywide to be marketed by the Central Florida Development Council, other economic development organizations, and commercial real estate brokers. Identify sites that need land use changes countywide. Proactively initiate those changes either by encouraging the land owner or developer or the county or cities initiating the change. The county/cities may have to compromise and share costs with land owners to make the needed land use and permitting changes. Encourage the private sector or form private sector consortiums, to invest in office/industrial parks and build speculative buildings. When the private sector does not step up then the public sector may have to ensure that sites and projects are assembled, permitted and ready for development. The public sector may have to be more involved in the rehab of existing buildings. Add all empty buildings in Polk County that are available for sale and redevelopment to the CFDC website.

4. Maintain a list of targeted job sectors that will sharpen our economic development focus on higher paying jobs and result in meeting our Key Benchmarks. Possibilities for these targeted job sectors are:

- a. Food processing
- b. Finance/insurance/back office/professional service firms
- c. Corporate headquarters
- d. Medical instruments/bio-tech/healthcare related/clinical trials and other medical research
- e. Manufacturers of construction materials and supplies
- f. Electronics

- g. Value-added³⁰, high paying jobs suited for a Central Florida location**
- h. State and Federal agencies**
- i. Computer/information technology**

5. Create highly competitive incentive and tax exemption programs that attract new higher paying jobs through relocation, expansion, retention and new enterprise creation. Use Community Redevelopment Agencies (CRA's), Hub Zones, Enterprise Zones and Free Trade Zones as economic development tools.

6. Encourage small business development and entrepreneurs in higher paying job creation including:

- a. Providing venture capital**
- b. Developing business incubators**
- c. Providing an entrepreneurs network in Polk County**
- d. Creating a USF Lakeland center for entrepreneurial leadership, mentoring, training and advice**
- e. Creating partnerships between Polk County businesses and research entities that commercialize research**
- f. Opening a Small Business Development Center**

7. Create an environment that attracts and retains a creative young work force in Polk County.

8. Make an affirmative commitment to inclusion and expanding opportunities to reduce the gap in per capita income between whites and minorities by increasing the average per capita income of minorities.

9. Regularly survey existing Polk County businesses and determine their needs for expansion and retention. When an expansion or retention opportunity occurs, treat this existing business as a prospect for new job creation. Survey prospects that chose not to locate in Polk County and businesses that have left Polk County to understand the reasons for their decision. Proactively fix all the problems uncovered in both surveys on a timely basis.

10. Expand tourism in Polk County, capture tourists to spend time and dollars in Polk County and expand eco-tourism and historical tourism.

11. Continuously maintain globally competitive high speed broadband communications countywide to support high-tech and high-wage job growth.

³⁰ In every region, there are jobs that add value for export of goods or services outside the region to the rest of the U.S. and the World. Export of services includes non-residents bringing their cash dollars to the region as conventioners, tourists, students, medical patients or as the back office operation for major financial organizations. These value-added jobs produce the cash income for the region that provides the opportunity for jobs that are internally focused. These internally focused jobs are either 1) local personal type jobs like barbers, accountants, lawyers, teachers, government workers and bankers or 2) jobs that sell products primarily produced elsewhere such as cars, appliances or clothes. Both of these internally focused job types rely on cash income from outside the region.

III. INFRASTRUCTURE

VISION

Before 2024, Polk County will have growth management and infrastructure that protects the environment and quality of life, supports education and economic development and is economically sustainable.

STRATEGIES:

A. Growth Management

1. Maintain a comprehensive land use plan that is coordinated with countywide infrastructure plans.

- a. The countywide plan will include an infrastructure master plan for the following elements: transportation (including all modes – roadway, mass transit, pedestrian, bikeways, sidewalk, waterways, air and train), water, sewage, solid waste, parks and recreation, schools, libraries, public safety, cultural activities, housing, open space, environment, electric power, communications, drainage, healthcare, other government facilities, “quality of life enhancement” and economic development. Each physical infrastructure element will have a required level of service developed with public input.
- b. The land use and infrastructure plans will include strategic area plans that encompass the wide diversity and size of the county and discourage urban sprawl. These strategic area plans will be coordinated with plans from the 17 municipalities. Ensure cooperation, equity and trust from all parts of the county in creating and maintaining the plans. This will require joint planning across the county and between the county and all municipalities. Create and maintain a public partnership and a private-public partnership for all elements of infrastructure planning and development. County government and Polk Vision will provide the leadership to create and sustain these partnerships.
- c. The county and municipal land use and infrastructure plans will provide the capacity required to meet the Key Benchmarks and Strategy Benchmarks and Visions. Our infrastructure will be aligned with our targeted job sectors.
- d. The major focus in all parts of these plans will be to create sustainable neighborhoods and municipalities and together a sustainable county with an enhanced quality of life for all our residents.
- e. All the master plans will be coordinated and build-out phased for the most efficient and effective construction of the infrastructure elements, but phasing will be consistent with creating trust and equity countywide. Incentives and disincentives will be used to create the best plan and sequence. Decisions will be made that are based more on engineering, science, cost accounting and fact rather than emotion.
- f. Develop an “activity based cost accounting” system to create an equitable and fair land use planning computer model. This model will be used in “planning by the numbers” in order to understand the income and cost effects of different land uses. The model will allow maintaining a sustainable and balanced comprehensive land use plan for the county. Use the result from this model to help Polk County residents to understand the economics of growth management (see Vision Task Force Notebook page 246 and following, or “The Economics of Land Uses in Polk County, Florida” from the Florida Stewardship Foundation).
- g. Paint a “picture” for our residents of our vision for Polk County in 20 years through growth management. Change perception of the effects of growth.

- h. Development codes and ordinances will be enforced and aligned with the land use plan and elements in infrastructure master plans.**
- i. Design and redevelop neighborhoods with play areas, trails, waterways, sidewalks, porches and amenities that increase neighborhood interaction. Each neighborhood will have a community center and each four or so neighborhoods will have a village center. These centers could include churches, schools, shopping, recreation, social service providers, parks, public safety, youth services, or other services. The neighborhoods will be linked together by walking and bike trails that will link into countywide trails, lakes and recreation.**
- j. The countywide plan will include a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) that uses innovative funding for all infrastructure development on an annual basis with a 10-year projection. This CIP will provide for infrastructure development required to eliminate the gap in each infrastructure master plan and provide for growth over 10 years. The countywide CIP will include in one document and spreadsheet all infrastructure whether financed by Federal, State, County, School Board, municipal or other governmental authorities or entities. All projects required to meet the service level required for each type of infrastructure will be included whether funds for construction are currently available or not. The CIP will be used as an instrument to initiate dialogue on establishing project priority and trade-offs and find the best way over time to finance each required project.**

2. Total new residential and business growth each year will be expected to pay for the incremental costs associated with infrastructure and annual operation cost of such growth. This would include without limitation, the cost of upsizing utilities, providing land for schools, parks, open space, etc. in addition to impact fees and partial year assessments.

3. Expect the county government to provide for or ensure municipal type services in urbanized, unincorporated areas to ensure consistent high quality services are available to all residents. This will include, among other sources, impact fees, etc.

4. Prior to a rezoning request being approved for a rental manufactured home park, the residents should be allowed the opportunity to purchase the park and the park become a resident-owned complex.

B. Transportation

1. Create a Polk County Regional Transportation Authority that builds and operates a countywide transit system with bus and rail elements linked together and works with the county and municipalities in planning and constructing the countywide road transportation system.

2. Ensure that Polk County receives its fair share of Florida and Federal transportation funding dollars.

3. Ensure that major roads are continually improved and have adequate capacity. Build limited access highways to serve all parts of the county. Implement a Ridge North-South transportation plan that includes a limited access highway (either Hwy 27 or a parallel road).

4. Take advantage of all public access airports in the county to attract general aviation, charter and regular passenger air service.

5. Implement the Polk Unified Greenway System.

C. Water and Sewer Utilities

1. Elected and appointed officials will take aggressive action to ensure that water capacity is available and permitted to meet our benchmarks and provide a sustainable water capacity well into this century. The water management district has indicated an additional 40 million gallon per day need within 20 years. This may be the most serious issue to deal with in meeting Polk County's economic development benchmarks. The problem cannot be solved by each municipality individually, but requires urgent countywide attention.

D. Environment and Natural Resources

1. Focus on improving our aesthetics and beauty to improve our quality of life. Protect the environment, air and water quality and trees. Develop a tree ordinance. Encourage continuation of agricultural uses and lands, and purchase endangered wildlife lands.

2. Encourage our citizens and visitors to use and enjoy lakes and rivers, while:

- a. Protecting and improving the natural environment of our lakes
- b. Developing lakefront areas to utilize Polk County's greatest natural resource
- c. Preserving the water quality of our lakes
- d. Increasing wildlife habitat
- e. Promoting community awareness and pride in our lakes through activities which provide economic and environmental benefits

3. Restrict development in environmentally sensitive areas.

4. Support reclamation efforts of phosphate land and advocate for the legislature to fully fund the trust fund for this purpose.

5. Provide incentives to support and expand recycling while increasing utilization of recycling facilities.

6. Encourage landfills to be open on weekends.

7. Emphasize our unique habitat areas such as the Ridge areas.

8. Recognize that our economy and quality of life depends on a clean and healthy environment.

9. Develop a strong anti-litter campaign.

E. Housing

1. Ensure that adequate housing is available at prices affordable for the range of earnings per job existing in Polk County.

2. Improve low-income housing and eliminate substandard housing. **Maintain rigorous code enforcement.**

3. Find ways to increase the percentage of higher priced housing.

F. Redevelopment

1. Fix up and improve low-income areas.

2. Develop neighborhood comprehensive plans for all county and city neighborhoods in distress and focus on reversing the decline.
3. Improve the environment and living conditions through vigorous code enforcement.
4. Form community partnerships to help with redevelopment.

IV. GOVERNMENT

VISION

Before 2024, Polk County will have a comprehensive system of government that is effective, efficient and diverse while responding to the basic needs of its citizens.

STRATEGIES:

- 1. Encourage all levels of government in Polk County to formally endorse Polk Vision and provide the leadership and resources to implement the Strategies, Visions and Key Benchmarks and use the Core Values in guiding decision making.**
- 2. Create more cooperation and teamwork between cities, county, school board, state and federal government, private sector, and citizens to resolve and/or solve problems and better utilize scarce resources. Develop formal planning between cities, county government and school board on services that duplicate and intersect.**
- 3. Continue the 5 member county commission but hold them to the current charter requirements of setting policy and the budget and letting the County Manager execute that policy as head of the administrative branch of county government. The County Manager shall be responsible to the County Commission for the proper administration of all affairs of the county. Except for the purpose of inquiry and information, members of the Board of County Commissioners are expressly prohibited from interfering with the performance of the duties of any employee of the county government who is under the direct or indirect supervision of the County Manager. Such action shall be malfeasance within the meaning of Article IV, Section 7(a) of the Florida Constitution.**
- 4. Create and maintain a sense of urgency for all city and county government. Dramatically increase productivity while at the same time improving the quality of service.**
- 5. Improve or develop innovative means of communicating issues and news to Polk County residents by hard copy, email, websites, countywide television and other delivery means including:**
 - a. Quarterly newsletters**
 - b. Alternative position statements and questionnaires on issues pending before the County Commission, School Board, City Councils and Legislature well in advance of making a decision**
 - c. Posting agendas and minutes of all government meetings on the appropriate government websites**
 - d. Engagement between government and citizens with more listening and solicitation of input by government**
 - e. Public awareness program to inform residents about the need to increase the tax base and other issues**
 - f. Speakers Bureau to communicate issues**
 - g. Make the Internet more accessible to citizens**
 - h. Quarterly town hall meetings across the county at times convenient to more citizens**
 - i. Communications with residents about changes in the area where change will occur**

6. Increase the tax base.

7. Expect candidates for elected offices to endorse Polk Vision and commit to its implementation if elected.

8. The Polk County Commission will consider and make the decision about using Municipal Service Taxing Units (MSTU's), Municipal Service Benefit Unit's (MSBU's), Community Development Districts (CDD's) and utility tax as funding sources in the county.

9. Adopt a Code of Governance by which governments, elected officials and staffs, operate including a commitment to the following qualities:

Accessible	Coordinated	Equitable	Productive
Accountable	Courageous	Ethical	Responsible
Caring	Credible	Fiscally responsible	Responsive
Civil	Customer friendly	Intelligent	Unified
Collaborative	Diverse	Listener	Visionary
Competence	Effective	Objective	
Consensus building	Efficient	Pro-active	

10. Support economic development.

11. Change county commission to non-partisan elections.

12. Aggressively pursue federal and state grants for a wide variety of uses in Polk County. Attempt to get back as much or more than we send.

13. Maintain quarterly meetings of elected officials from all over the county to coordinate implementing the Polk Vision Strategies and achieving the Key Benchmarks.

14. Ensure that all property is continuously appraised by the property appraiser at the current value. Ensure that property is automatically reappraised after each sale.

15. Create diversity in appointments to the Polk County Planning Commission.

16. Increase voter participation.

17. Encourage the work at the Polk Efficiency Commission mandated by the Polk Charter

18. Require amendments to the charter to be approved for referendum by resolution of the BoCC at least 6 months prior to election (currently 45 days).

19. Recognize the tremendous contribution of immigrants and help them to integrate fully into Polk County life. Understand the hardship of illegal immigrants and help them take steps necessary to obtain driver's license and legal status as residents of Polk County. Recruit agencies to Polk County to facilitate the immigration process. Promote opportunities to learn English, earn a GED and receive skills training.

20. Address the issue of tax equity between the units of government in Polk County.

21. Ensure equitable representation in county government and school board offices.

22. Organize a countywide association of homeowners associations that will provide input to governments. Provide \$5,000 grants for homeowners associations for beautification improvements in unincorporated and city areas.

23. Expand the number of branch county service centers and their services.

V. QUALITY OF LIFE

VISION

Before 2024, Polk County will have a quality of life that encourages diverse backgrounds to live in harmony while developing physically, spiritually, mentally, and culturally within a healthy and safe environment.

STRATEGIES:

A. Healthcare

1. Improve the quality of healthcare in Polk County while lowering the cost. Consider the following:

- a. Develop Polk County as a model wellness community that promotes physical fitness and healthy lifestyles in the workplace and for families. Encourage lunchtime exercise, employee discounts to health clubs, stop smoking programs, weight management programs, emphasis on nutrition and community health fairs.
- b. Ensure access to physicians at an early stage, rather than waiting for an emergency room visit
- c. Increase the number of physicians to improve access
- d. Increase the working age/retirement age ratio through job creation
- e. Reduce the impact of litigation and malpractice insurance costs
- f. Provide affordable or free clinics countywide and other pro-bono physician services, including medical, mental health, and dental care
- g. Offer evening hours of service
- h. Make a dramatic infusion of technology into the total healthcare system to increase productivity
- i. Recognize the value of arts in healthcare
- j. Develop coalition of healthcare organizations to pursue grants for prevention
- k. Improve access for substance abuse treatment
- l. Develop affordable health insurance for small business
- m. Provide reasonable access to emergency rooms for real emergencies and critically ill - the uninsured with minor illnesses to be treated at free clinics
- n. Increase and improve access for preventive healthcare services
- o. Attract businesses that provide health insurance for employees
- p. Existing businesses provide more benefits and better insurance plans
- q. Educate parents and families about healthcare
- r. Reduce fraud
- s. Encourage company participation in company paid preventive healthcare programs
- t. Maximize the use of Kid Care insurance

2. Work to expand the availability of high quality, affordable, attentive, accessible, available healthcare with a large number of choices in medical specialties, including comprehensive and long term mental healthcare.

3. Increase the number of health student “slots” in local colleges until the Polk County demand for nurses and other health professionals is met.

B. Sense of Community

1. Create a Polk County sense of community that fosters pride in our county, emphasizes our sense of place, celebrates our heritage, and recognizes and includes our many physical assets and diverse cultures.

2. Encourage the government and private sector leadership to reach out across Polk County to develop a sense of trust and equity among all of our residents. Be more receptive to community input.

3. Strongly encourage each part of the unincorporated county and municipalities to prepare for the future including location of strategic assets. When users or clients make a decision about a project location - accept the fact, congratulate the site chosen, recognize that if your site has merit that its turn will come. Review the site selection decisions and upgrade any deficits discovered. Develop a forward thinking, non-competitive view of county, neighborhoods and local areas.

4. Create a Polk County media identity. Create a Polk TV station. Publicize and promote the positive aspects of Polk County. Provide better media promotion of activities and happenings to all areas of the county.

5. Celebrate our diverse international backgrounds and cultures

C. Arts, Culture, Recreation and Entertainment

1. Provide countywide access to arts and cultural facilities.

2. Promote all of Polk County's art, culture, historical preservation and tourism assets within Polk County, the state and U.S. Maintain and distribute widely a Polk calendar of Polk arts and recreation activities.

3. Create diversified recreational choices for young people. Use teen boards to listen to our young people and find the best way to meet their recreational, arts and cultural needs.

4. Improve quality and quantity of nightlife, dining, and entertainment. Create amenities/culture attractive to young professionals.

5. Improve the quality of arts in Polk County, increase the usage of current facilities, and make Polk County a destination for arts, culture and historic preservation.

6. Develop broader business support for arts, and culture throughout the county.

7. Develop major urban parks throughout the county to provide open green space, nature trail/jogging path, horse-riding trails, lakes, etc. (see III. Infrastructure A.1. for parks and recreation master plan).

D. Family and Youth

1. Encourage volunteer organizations and parents to prepare young people to accept the responsibilities of marriage, family, and children.

2. Encourage faith-based organizations to increase their involvement, understanding, support and encouragement for stable, healthy, and safe families and marriages.

3. Provide incentives, encouragement and support that results in stable, healthy, safe marriages and families.
4. Provide incentives and positive reinforcement for students; develop positive peer pressure to make good grades and good choices that lead to success.
5. Develop after school programs for students using private, public, and faith-based resources.
6. Strive to dramatically reduce pregnancy rates in unwed mothers.

E. Social Services

1. Develop programs that provide opportunities for all people to learn how to become self-sufficient and to meet their basic needs, which will allow them to focus on improving their quality of life.

2. Develop “one-stop” social service delivery and prevention centers in enough locations countywide for reasonable accessibility. Increase the awareness of social service availability....develop a “211 hotline” and accompanying database to facilitate social service provision.

3. Coordinate funding and service provision by social service organizations countywide to maximize scarce resources in the most effective and efficient way.
4. Provide quality childcare 24 hours a day.
5. Eliminate Federal, State and Polk County disincentives to marriage.
6. Support and expand agencies that provide children and family services. Reduce abuse and neglect rates for children and spouses. Increase Guardian Ad Litem representation for all children who are involved in dependency court, because of physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect or abandonment.
7. Provide adult daycare.
8. Increase the involvement and funding of faith-based organizations in delivery of social services.
9. Encourage neighborhood volunteers’ help to allow the elderly to live independently as long as possible.
10. Provide temporary shelter and services for the chronically homeless.
11. Provide transitional housing and services for families including women with teenage boys.
12. Encourage faith-based institutions to help rehabilitate criminals released from prison.

F. Public Safety

1. Maintain a public safety system (police and EMS) that increases the safety of Polk residents, visitors and employers.

2. Continue to improve the crime rate in lower income communities.

3. Maintain a comprehensive plan to ensure the safety of all citizens, governments, and schools from all high-risk threats (natural or manmade).

G. Senior Population

1. Encourage the Polk senior population to be involved in helping to create a better quality of life. These are people with long life experience who could use their wisdom and skills in education, mentoring, business counseling, etc.

2. Provide a full range of quality senior housing from active adult communities to assisted living.

3. Polk County becomes a model county in assuring that every person will be afforded access to hospice and palliative care, and those providing hospice and palliative care do so in a manner that provides for grace, dignity, and comfort in the final phase of life.

4. Work with the Veterans Administration to improve services in Polk County.

VI. PRIVATE SECTOR LEADERSHIP

VISION

Before 2024, Polk County will have private sector leadership that drives the partnership with government and citizens in ensuring that Polk County is a premiere place to live, learn, work and play.

STRATEGIES:

- 1. Encourage all private sector organizations (for profit and not-for-profit) in Polk County to endorse Polk Vision and provide the leadership to obtain resources to implement the Strategies, Visions, and Key Benchmarks and use the Core Values in guiding decision making.**
- 2. Create Leadership Polk. Provide training for a large and diverse group of potential and existing leaders and mentorship for new leaders of all ages. The Leadership groups will be diverse in age, race, gender and location. Develop leadership at the neighborhood/grassroots level. Ensure that there is training in diversity issues in leadership programs and continuous communication of those issues.**
- 3. Sustain a strong private sector commitment to implement and communicate Polk Vision. Ensure that Polk Vision represents and advocates all areas of the county. Communicate awareness of Polk Vision at the grassroots level. Support Polk Vision and its implementation as a way to create dialog, trust and equity throughout Polk County.**
- 4. Encourage qualified leaders to run for office and be on appointed boards. Support these leaders during their term in office, or suggest corrective action, as they inevitably experience the conflicts and challenges of making difficult decisions in the best interest of the entire county.**
- 5. Expect Polk County citizens to be the final check and balance for government elected officials and demand accountability for their actions in creating the Polk County we all desire.**
- 6. Develop strong, positive, forward-thinking countywide organizations that can partner with each other and local organizations to bring Polk County residents together.**
- 7. Encourage all private, faith-based, for-profit, and not-for-profit organizations to adopt and implement strategies throughout the six Polk Vision foundations.**
8. Use existing Private Sector Advisory Committees and listen to their suggestions.
9. Create a Polk County Community Foundation.
10. Create a Polk County Urban League.
11. Create a Polk County Newcomers Club.
12. Have adults set examples of community service for youth.
13. Create an annual Polk County city visit to another community to learn best practices.

14. Encourage sensitivity and diversity training countywide. Recognize, support and respect diversity and accept diversity as a positive force in the community.

15. Encourage our residents age 55+ to be involved in the implementation of Polk Vision using their broad depth of wisdom and experience.

16. Develop countywide toll-free calling.

17. Make an affirmative commitment to inclusion and expanding opportunities to reduce the gap in per capita income between whites and minorities.

GLOSSARY

Our Long-term Vision

20 years

- Visions for each of the interdependent foundations for a comprehensive Strategic Plan
 - + Education + Quality of Life
 - + Economic Development + Government
 - + Infrastructure + Private Sector Leadership
- Core Values
- Key Benchmarks

Our Mid-term Vision

5 to 10 years

- Strategies for each of the six foundations
- Priority Strategies

Our Short-term Implementation Plan

1 to 5 years

Developed and implemented by Strategic Alliances and Vision Partners for individual strategies beginning in August 2004

- Strategy Benchmarks
- Action Steps

DEFINITIONS OF ABOVE TERMS:

Foundations - Basic framework that will provide a comprehensive Vision for the community in the following interdependent areas: Education, Economic Development, Infrastructure, Quality of Life, Government, and Private Sector Leadership (for-profit and not-for-profit).

Visions - A Vision defines what the community wants to be in the future in each of the six Foundation areas.

Core Values - Character traits that guide daily decision-making.

Key Benchmarks - Seven annual measurements of the community's progress towards achieving its long-term Vision. This will require positive results from the six *interdependent* Foundations and provide accountability for the process.

Long Term Vision - includes the Visions for the six Foundations, Core Values, Key Benchmarks and Priority Issues.

Strategies - A verbal picture of the future in a specific part of a particular Foundation. Twenty to thirty strategies in each Foundation will provide a more detailed definition of each Foundation Vision. There are priority strategies for each Foundation. The strategies were ranked by the Vision Task Force within Foundations and sub-sections of Foundations. An example of a strategy is "*Increase the graduation rate.*"

Vision Partner - Any organization, business, civic group, government entity, church, etc. that has volunteered to collaborate with other community members to implement the Vision and Strategic Plan. Vision Partners are the organizations who take responsibility for making individual strategies reality.

Strategic Alliances - Two or more Vision Partners who work together to implement a specific strategy because of their experience, strengths, and synergy from combined efforts. The Vision Partners in the Alliance will elect a chair or an organization will be assigned to be responsible for providing leadership. Alliance Benchmarks and Action Steps will be developed for the Strategic Alliance. The Vision Partners will then assume responsibility for the Action Steps that fall within their own scope of operations.

Strategy Benchmarks - Annual measurement of the progress of a specific strategy that provides accountability for the process on an annual basis for 3 to 10 years. *Example: Increase the graduation rate 2% per year for 10 years. The Strategy Benchmark should be developed by the Vision Partner before the Action Steps.*

Action Steps - What the Vision Partner is going to do to implement a strategy. A series of projects or events developed by the Vision Partner to meet the Strategy Benchmark for a specific Strategy. Financing is an Action Step.

Phase I - DEVELOPING THE STRATEGIC PLAN

- A. Henry Luke was hired in November 2003 by **POLK VISION, INC** to facilitate Polk Vision. Funding is being provided by Founding Partners (see page 41).
- B. A diverse 42-person Steering Committee representative of the community was selected to guide the process.
- C. Henry Luke interviewed 350 individuals in Focus Groups during January - March 2004.
- D. Over 350 people attended the five Community Meetings March 4-18, 2004. Twenty-three groups identified 619 unique issues for consideration by the Vision Task Forces. The issues were summarized and ranked by the groups, then combined to produce the top ten priority issues. The participants also selected 23 additional members for the Vision Task Force.
- E. The Steering Committee selected a diverse Vision Task Force from all sectors and geographic areas of Polk County from persons nominated by the Steering Committee, Focus Group interviewees, Community Meetings, self nomination, and the 23 individuals selected at the Community Meetings. The Vision Task Force was created in five parts to geographically represent Polk County. These five parts of the Task Force met in Winter Haven, Bartow, Lakeland, Haines City, and Lake Wales.
- F. The 390+ member Vision Task Force met in five parts of the county during April and May 2004 and distilled the Focus Groups and Community Meetings issues into a draft **POLK VISION**. This draft was edited at a joint meeting of the Vision Task Force on May 17, 2004. They reached consensus on the draft Vision with 144 strategies, which was distributed on May 18, 2004 for public input and comments. There were at least 122 presentations with over 4,000 people present. Newspapers distributed over 120,000 copies of the draft. Presentations to the County Commission and School Board were on live PGTV and were rerun several times.
- G. On July 26 and 27, 2004, Community Meetings were held in Auburndale and Lake Wales for a final opportunity to review and provide comments on the draft **POLK VISION**.
- H. After considering all the input received, the Steering Committee approved the revised Vision document and printed copies for distribution in August 2004.

Phase II - COLLABORATIVE IMPLEMENTATION

- A. The **Polk Vision** Steering Committee will continue to be diverse and community-based to provide leadership, accountability and communication during the implementation process.
- B. Private and public sector organizations of all kinds and individuals will be asked to endorse the Strategic Plan and become Vision Partners (begin August 2004).
- C. Vision Partners who endorse the Vision will be asked to identify those strategies they can incorporate and effectively implement within their normal mission, purpose and scope of operations or in strategic alliances with other organizations. Each Vision Partner or Strategic Alliance will establish Strategy Benchmarks to facilitate annual measurement of progress and develop Action Steps for the specific strategies they adopt. The Steering Committee and Benchmark Team will approve all Strategy Benchmarks before their adoption as official **Polk Vision** Benchmarks (begin October 2004).
- D. Strategy identification and acceptance by Vision Partners will be reviewed by the Steering Committee to ensure that the Priority Strategies are being implemented on a timely basis. Progress on every strategy cannot begin immediately, but will be phased in over a 5 to 10 year period as applicable.

- E. Progress on strategies will be communicated on a regular basis.
- F. There will be an annual update of the Key Benchmarks and the Strategy Benchmarks measuring progress for each strategy adopted by Vision Partners and Strategic Alliances.
- G. The *Polk Vision* staff will provide management support, communication, coordination and advocacy.