

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

### Introduction

The Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council has had a strong economic component since the first policy plan (1975). The importance of economic factors is reflected in Council publications, including "Economic Views" (published monthly) and the Description of the Region. The Council's economic efforts are further strengthened by its designation as an Economic Development District, a program of the U. S. Economic Development Administration. The Council also created the Southwest Florida Economic Development Coalition to review and comment on economic development.

### Vision Statement

The following vision statement is based on an initial effort by the Economic Development Coalition:

Southwest Florida will attract, retain, and create quality businesses to diversify its economic base, while protecting the natural and cultural environments, to promote economic stability, greater job and educational opportunities, and higher income for its residents.

The vision statement served as the basis for the development of the following economic issues. Regional resources and facilities are listed at the end of this element.

### ➤ ISSUES

#### ❖ ECONOMIC INFRASTRUCTURE

Economic infrastructure consists of the wide range of human and physical components necessary for society's functions. These include the social, health, and education systems that support the individual's development from the cradle to the grave; information systems for worldwide access; the transportation system for movement of goods and services; and community systems of daily "necessities-of-life" infrastructure. There are also the basics of life: water resources and food and fiber production.

The physical infrastructure is rapidly expanding. The challenge is that most public facilities are relatively new (due to past rapid growth) but aging. While growth continues and maintenance requirements increase, forecasts are grim for funding.

Maximizing the use of existing facilities through increased capacity can serve additional development more efficiently, without the cost of new construction (assuming the expansion can meet relevant requirements). In addition, expansion of an existing facility can encourage continued development and infill in its service area.

Rural infrastructure is often rudimentary and small. This reflects low tax bases, with few opportunities to raise funds through enterprise or user fees. Reductions in grants for infrastructure have made it more difficult for small communities to provide and upgrade their infrastructure. In addition, facilities such as air cargo, rail, etc. require sufficient market demand before they are financially feasible. These factors decrease the attractiveness of rural areas for investment and make them unintended targets for uses unacceptable in urban areas.

**Goal 1: A well-maintained social, health, and educational infrastructure to support business and industry.**

**Strategy: Continually improve the educational system to produce an educated and trained work force.**

Actions:

1. Use the economic advisory committees to assist in the exchange of information between the educational system and the business community about business needs.
2. Use the economic advisory committees to advise educational institutions to increase upper division and graduate level studies through programs appropriate to regional needs.
3. Review proposed development for impacts on and opportunities to provide needed educational facilities and services.

Indicators:

- Student retention rates that meet or exceed those of the state.
- Rate of high school graduates entering post-secondary school that meets or exceeds that of the state.
- Expansion of degrees and programs offered by post-secondary schools.

**Strategy: Ensure a health care system that addresses the needs of both business and the work force.**

Actions:

1. Participate in the study of health insurance options for employers and employees.
2. Review proposed development for impacts on and opportunities to provide needed health care facilities and services.

Indicators:

- Decreased rates of death, disability, and illness.
- Reduction in the rate of health care cost increases.
- Reduction in the rate of health insurance cost increases.

**Strategy: Maintain the physical infrastructure to meet growth demands.**

Actions:

1. Review plan amendments, development proposals, and clearinghouse items for public facility deficits and encourage mitigation of those deficits.
2. Assist local governments and state agencies in planning for future support service facilities, before the need arises.
3. Review proposed public facilities to ensure their location in urban areas that have in place, or are covered by binding agreements to provide, the resources and facilities for desired growth in an environmentally acceptable manner.
4. Study alternatives and assist other entities to study alternatives to encourage land development that maximizes the use, rehabilitation, and re-use of existing facilities, structures, and buildings as an alternative to new construction and development.
5. Review proposed public facilities and services to ensure that costs are allocated on the basis of benefits received by existing and future residents.
6. Review proposed development to require the developer to install or finance the necessary infrastructure and to provide land for the needed support services.
7. Assist local governments to obtain funding to maintain, improve, or expand their infrastructure.

Indicators:

- An inventory of support services and facilities.
- Increased funding of infrastructure from non-local sources.

**Strategy: Ensure the adequacy of lands for commercial and industrial centers, with suitable services provided.**

Actions:

1. Map or assist in mapping the appropriate distribution of urban uses for growth.
2. Identify existing urban lands and transportation corridors for development or redevelopment, and ensure adequate access and services are provided.
3. Include in planning efforts the recognition of lands with natural capacity, accessibility, previous preparation for urban purposes, and adequate public facilities.
4. Participate, coordinate, or promote intergovernmental coordination for siting unpopular land uses.
5. Review proposed development for increased densities and infill in suitable urban areas.

Indicators:

- Increased square footage of development in central business districts when compared with overall population growth.
- Reduced average distance from residential areas to commercial/service sites.
- Increased expansion of appropriate trade and service areas for future residential areas.

**Strategy: Ensure the availability of the infrastructure needed for advanced telecommunications and high technology.**

Actions:

1. Inventory existing high-technology infrastructure and promote efforts to eliminate impediments.
2. Promote public and private efforts to monitor and anticipate the need for high-technology infrastructure and to evaluate funding sources to meet those needs.
3. Participate with public and private entities to address potential conflicts due to the placement of communication towers and similar high-technology infrastructure.

Indicators:

- Cooperative arrangements with regulators and public and private providers of high-technology infrastructure.

**Strategy: Ensure adequate infrastructure for rural areas.**

Actions:

1. Advocate the prioritization of public discretionary technical assistance and infrastructure grants for rural areas with inadequate infrastructure.
2. Evaluate locally undesirable land uses as part of rural economic development.
3. Assist rural local governments to develop grant applications.

Indicators:

- Adopted levels of service in rural areas, compared with levels of service in urban areas.
- Improved rural infrastructure.

**Strategy: Promote the use of alternative energy resources.**

Actions:

1. Review proposed development to promote energy conservation.
2. Participate in analysis of the production of agricultural energy such as fuel alcohol and methane capture.
3. Participate in an ongoing regional forum on alternative energy research and development.

Indicators:

- More occupational licenses for energy production or installation of energy conservation appliances or energy-producing devices or equipment.
- Increased sales of solar water heaters and other alternative energy systems.

❖ **THE WORK FORCE**

An essential part of regional economic development is the workforce. There must be enough properly trained workers to allow business development and expansion.

Employment levels in Southwest Florida vary during the year. For example, winter residents and visitors create a demand for seasonal workers. The agricultural work year also has significant "peaks" and "valleys." Additionally, rural areas have higher unemployment rates and lower average wage scales than the Region, state, and nation as a whole.

Training programs and assistance programs will continue to have high demand as the population increases. Further, many jobs will require continuous retraining for employees.

**Goal 2: A well-educated, well-trained work force.**

**Strategy: Enhance the skill level of the regional work force.**

Actions:

1. Coordinate with the public and private sectors to assess skills for targeted industries.
2. Participate with educators, business groups, and public entities such as the Workforce Development Boards to establish training and educational programs.
3. Participate in, support, and market the one-stop concept for work force development.

Indicators:

- Increased capacity of job-training programs.
- Increased participation by employers in work force development.
- Improvements in educational attainment.

**Strategy: Ensure a wide range of employment for all Southwest Floridians.**

Actions:

1. Identify employment sectors that create jobs appropriate to this Region.
2. Participate in business, industrial, and governmental organizations to attract diversified and permanent employment.
3. Assist rural local governments to increase services for start-up businesses and entrepreneurs.

4. Cooperate with the public and private sectors to increase the use of enterprise zones, economic development districts, community development corporations, and similar programs to expand job opportunities.
5. Review proposed development to increase the access of working parents to the job market through arrangements such as on-site day care facilities and flexible work hours.

Indicators:

- A regional job creation rate greater than the rate of population increase.
- A regional job creation rate greater than the state rate.
- Increased number of enterprise zones, free trade zones, etc.

**Strategy: Reduce seasonal variations in employment.**

Actions:

1. Assist in business formation or location in areas with high seasonal or year-round unemployment.
2. Assist in development of off-season tourism for tourist and agricultural centers, focusing on eco-tourism.

Indicators:

- Decreased seasonal variation of the unemployment rate.
- Increased percentage of year-round jobs.

**Strategy: Improve the high rates of unemployment and low wage scales in rural areas.**

Actions:

1. Identify economically depressed areas and assist with applications for funding and economic development planning.
2. Assist communities largely reliant upon agricultural income or employment to diversify their employment and tax bases.
3. Assist in the development and expansion of rural tourism and eco-tourism.
4. Assist in the development of information programs, including signage coordinated with transportation agencies, for rural historic places and cultural and historical activities.

Indicators:

- Reduced out migration rates among younger rural residents.
- Increased median education and income levels in rural areas.
- Increased real value or square footages of commercial, governmental, residential, and cultural land uses in rural areas.
- More rural economic development programs.
- More programs for rural downtown preservation and revitalization.

❖ **LIVABLE COMMUNITIES**

Livable communities require a sustainable economic vitality. Since Southwest Florida has been reinventing its economic base over the last half century, this is difficult to accomplish. The region's communities were founded to support agriculture, tourism, fishing, hunting, and passive uses of resources that formed the base of the early regional economy. These are still strong components of the quality of life for residents and visitors. That quality of life contributes strongly to the trade and service sectors of the economy.

A major concern is how additional development will affect overall community livability. Some residents are reluctant to accept growth due to concerns about degradation of the quality of life. They may be unaware of the benefits of economic development and may not support efforts to attract new businesses or to help existing ones grow. Support for economic development--based on recognition of the importance of the quality of life--will translate into increased resources to enhance and expand the range of programs offered to new or existing businesses.

Most new jobs in the Region come from the growth of existing businesses or the creation of new businesses by area residents. Thus, enhancement of the resources for small business growth will result in new jobs and a growing tax base. Small business growth in turn translates into a stronger interest in keeping the community a desirable place to continue to live.

**Goal 3: A stable regional economy based on a continuing excellent quality of life.**

**Strategy: Maintain and improve the natural, historic, cultural, and tourist-related resources as primary regional economic assets.**

Actions:

1. Assist in the identification and acquisition of potential park and recreational sites and other resources in future growth areas.
2. Participate in studies, plans, and programs for public access to beaches and other resources.
3. Review proposed development to require that natural and other resources of regional significance are maintained, enhanced, restored, or re-created, as appropriate.

Indicators:

- Development of a regional inventory of natural and other resources.
- Increased preservation/conservation/utility zones covering water sources.
- More public beach access points and boat ramps.
- Fewer closings of public swimming areas or shellfish beds due to health hazards.
- Increased designations of historic sites, with public access.

**Strategy: Ensure sustainable volumes of natural resources for economic productivity.**

Actions:

1. Promote and assist resource planning programs to incorporate local government population projections and assessments of land consumption.

2. Offer mediation and facilitation to resource-based planning programs that have conflicts with land use-based planning programs.

Indicators:

- Reduced application times for standard permits.
- Increased identification and "pre-clearance" of sites suitable for permitting.
- More "ready-to-serve" designated areas.

**Strategy: Enhance existing commercial, service, and industrial centers through adequate maintenance and reinvestment.**

Actions:

1. Maintain an inventory of public infrastructure and recommended improvements.
2. Review plan amendments, new plans, and land development regulations for incentives to develop and redevelop land downtown.
3. Review proposed development to maximize the use, rehabilitation, and reuse of existing infrastructure.

Indicators:

- Increased building permit values in existing urban areas.

**Strategy: Protect the regional energy supply against disruption.**

Actions:

1. Review proposed development to promote development and construction patterns, techniques, and designs for more efficient use of energy.
2. Review proposed development to include alternative transportation methods such as sidewalks and bike lanes for greater energy efficiency.
3. Coordinate with other agencies to develop and/or modify transportation plans, traffic circulation plans, and regulations for more efficient use of energy.

Indicators:

- Reduced per capita fossil fuel use.
- Reduced proportion of energy from fossil fuels.
- Increased percentage of homes with solar energy devices or equipment.

**Strategy: Increase the retention and expansion of local business and industry and encourage local entrepreneurial development.**

Actions:

1. Provide services to facilitate entrepreneurship and the development of small and minority-owned business.

2. Cooperate with the public and private sectors to maintain information on regional economic development needs.
3. Coordinate among learning institutions, employment agencies, and others for training and educational needs.
4. Assist in increased use of economic development tools such as enterprise zones, incubator areas for small business formation, and community development corporations.
5. Identify and publicize programs for business development assistance.
6. Identify the needs of local businesses for capital or other assistance and the products they purchase and sell.

Indicators:

- Development and maintenance of a needs inventory for businesses.
- Publication of a resource guide for business development assistance.
- Increased number and range of SBA programs in the Region.
- More accessible incubator sites for manufacturing and service and retail trade.

**Strategy: Increase the preparedness of businesses for potential hazards and natural disasters.**

Actions:

1. Work with local emergency preparedness offices, economic development organizations, and other interested groups to alert businesses of the need to prepare for natural disasters.
2. Assist in making disaster-preparedness planning resources and tools, such as the Disaster Survival Workbook for Businesses, available to businesses in the region.

Indicators:

- Cooperative arrangements with interested groups for disaster preparedness for businesses.
- Development and publication of a guide for disaster preparation for businesses.

**Strategy: Enhance support for economic development.**

Actions:

1. Educate residents about the benefits of economic development.
2. Demonstrate to residents the benefits of reducing the over-dependence on residential properties for tax revenues.

Indicators:

- Periodic publication of the benefits of economic development.

**Strategy: Streamline regulatory processes to avoid delays for new or expanding businesses, provided safety, health, and environmental requirements are met.**

Actions:

1. Encourage local governments to expedite the permitting process and to assist businesses in permitting and licensing matters.
2. Cooperate with local governments, public agencies, environmental groups, and business groups to review permitting and licensing processes, forms, and related aspects for efficiency and standardization.

Indicators:

- Reduced time and cost to obtain standard permits for business formation and operation.
- Establishment of bodies to review permitting and licensing.
- Creation of ombudsman positions to assist businesses applying for permits or licenses.

**Strategy: Promote agriculture in the face of growing competition for land and water.**

Actions:

1. Cooperate with public and private entities to protect lands with high, sustainable production capability.
2. Participate in economic analyses of agricultural uses.

Indicators:

- Real dollar increases in agricultural production value, overall and by crop.
- Increased number and types of agricultural products.

❖ **DIVERSITY**

The employment sectors and occupational profile of the Region contain imbalances, particularly in more highly trained blue and white-collar professions. While the growing population should lead to improvements, it may be difficult to increase manufacturing employment significantly.

Attracting new businesses is also an important way to diversify the regional economy. New technology businesses, for example, can create high-paying jobs. In addition, as such businesses begin to locate in the Region, other similar businesses will follow.

The attraction of new business to a community is very competitive. It is also expensive due to costs of advertisements and marketing, participation in trade shows, and incentives.

**Goal 4: A diverse regional economy.**

**Strategy: Diversify the regional economy by attracting new business and industry.**

Actions:

1. Develop a list of targeted industries that create jobs suitable for this region.
2. Work with business, industry, and government to target industries appropriate for their markets.
3. Develop and publish demographic information and marketing materials to assist communities in business development.

Indicators:

- Broader range of businesses by Standard Industrial Classification.
- Development of a list of targeted, higher-wage industries.
- Periodic publication of essential demographic and marketing information.

**Strategy: Inventory the business incentives offered in the Region.**

Actions:

1. Review and analyze the effects of incentives, such as jobs created and average wages, as well as the community's estimate of the benefits.

Indicators:

- Publication of an assessment of incentives offered to business.

**Strategy: Work with communities to develop eco-tourism.**

Actions:

1. Assist in development, expansion, and funding of eco-tourism, especially for rural areas.
2. Provide eco-tourism information on the SWFRPC web site.

Indicators:

- Increased number of projects to assist rural communities.
- Increased information about eco-tourism on the SWFRPC web site.
- Increased number of grants, awards, etc. received by local governments for eco-tourism.

**Strategy: Increase regional access to capital markets.**

Actions:

1. Develop and publicize an inventory of financial programs for businesses.
2. Coordinate with public and private economic development groups, funding sources, and others to promote and market programs for business capital.
3. Continue to support and market the Southwest Florida Regional Development Corporation and the SBA 504 Loan Program.

4. Develop other capabilities, such as micro-loan and revolving loan fund programs, to assist small businesses.

Indicators:

- Inventory of economic development financial programs.
- Increased number of SBA 504 loans by SWFRDC to local businesses.
- Increased number of assistance programs available through SWFRDC.

❖ **MARKETING**

An important task is to market the region to business--as well as tourists and retirees. This region is more than a tourist destination and retirement area. The region also needs to continue to market itself as a location for new and relocating businesses.

The tourist or retiree may want to start a business, buy an existing one, or relocate a business from elsewhere. That interest may arise only upon visiting here. The business owner's experience may be crucial in any relocation decision.

The primary weekend visitor to recreational areas, festivals, and other events in the Region is usually a resident. Thus, promotion of local resources and events (and associated local stays) is a way to keep dollars in the region. This can be achieved more effectively if local tourist promoters participate in cooperative marketing of local and neighboring recreational opportunities.

In addition, some natural resources connect Southwest Florida and other regions. For example, boaters, tourists, and others use the water route along the Gulf shoreline between this Region and the Florida Keys from Southwest Florida and other regions.

**Goal 5: Increased tourism and business relocation.**

**Strategy: Promote both internal and inter-regional tourism.**

Actions:

1. Encourage increased regional tourism and promotion by local interests in other areas.
2. Advocate tourism between this and other regions and protect inter-regional tourism resources.

Indicators:

- Reduced variations in seasonal occupancy versus non-seasonal occupancy.
- Reduced variation in the percentage of tourist development taxes collected during the winter season versus summer season.
- Increased local participation in regional promotional efforts.

**Strategy: Re-evaluate the success of Southwest Florida as a retirement and tourist destination.**

Actions:

1. Review proposed development to protect the resources important to the quality of life.
2. Review capital improvement programs to identify the impacts and needs of residents and tourists and to prioritize improvements to accommodate both.
3. Cooperate with the public and private sectors to research funding for facilities and services to support tourism, consistent with local resources and plans.

Indicators:

- Analysis of retirement and tourism in the regional economy.

**Strategy: Promote Southwest Florida as a business location.**

Actions:

1. Participate in local and regional efforts to attract targeted businesses.
2. Encourage increased regional efforts to promote business relocations.

Indicators:

- Increased number of new business locations from other areas.
- Increased local participation in regional promotional efforts.

❖ **REGIONAL COOPERATION**

Potential participants in economic development include the educational community, the business sector, public agencies (primarily local and regional), and other groups and individuals. It is essential to ensure participation of representatives from all of these groups, public and private. That will lead to greater knowledge and awareness by each party of the needs and limitations of others, while reducing the potential for conflict seen in some public-private interactions.

**Goal 6: A system of cooperation and coordination for economic development that includes a broad range of public and private participants.**

**Strategy: Promote regional cooperation and coordination for economic development.**

Actions:

1. Promote cooperative arrangements and actions for economic development among business, governmental, and environmental groups, and other public and private entities.
2. Maintain the designation of the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council as an Economic Development District.
3. Continue to utilize the Southwest Florida Economic Development Coalition in the development and review of economic issues.

4. Continue the relationship with the Southwest Florida Regional Development Corporation.

Indicators:

- Continued designation as an Economic Development District.
- Continued support of the Economic Development Coalition.
- Continued relationship with SWFRDC.

**Strategy: Provide technical assistance to member local governments and other public economic development entities.**

Actions:

1. Develop and distribute economic and demographic information.
2. Maintain and expand the SWFRPC library of items about economic development.
3. Exchange information through the Southwest Florida Economic Development Coalition, and other workshops, groups, and committees.
4. Provide examples of economic elements for local comprehensive plans.
5. Review economic proposals, such as plan elements, projects, and grant applications.
6. Assist in development and preparation of applications for funding.

Indicators:

- Number of volumes in the economic section of the SWFRPC library.
- Number of projects and applications assisted by SWFRPC.

➤ **IMPLEMENTATION**

**This is a guide to ways in which SWFRPC could coordinate and interact with others to implement the goals in this element.**

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Goal 1</b>	<b>Goal 2</b>	<b>Goal 3</b>	<b>Goal 4</b>	<b>Goal 5</b>	<b>Goal 6</b>
Cities and counties	A/R/I/G	A/R/I/G	A/R/I/G	A/R/I/G	A/R/I/G	A/R/I/G
State agencies	A/I/G	A/I/G	A/I/G	A/I/G	A/I/G	A/I/G
Federal agencies	A/I/G		A/I/G	A/I/G	A/I/G	A/I/G
EDOs	A/I/G	A/I/G	A/I/G	A/I/G	A/I/G	A/I/G
SWFEDC and other economic advisory committees	A/I/G	A/I/G	A/I/G	A/I/G	A/I/G	A/I/G
Educational system	A/I	A/I	A/I			
Private developers	A/R/I	A/R/I	A/R/I		A/R/I	
Health care system	A/I					
Utilities	A/R/I	A/R/I	A/R/I			
Environmental groups	A/I	A/I	A/I	A/I/G	A/I/G	A/I/G
SBA			A/I	A/I		
SWFRDC			A/I/G	A/I/G		A/I/G
Emergency preparedness agencies			A/R/I			

A = advise or inform.

R = review or regulate.

I = implement or coordinate.

G = assist in grant application either to or for the entity listed.

**AGENCY ABBREVIATIONS**

- EDOs: Economic development organizations. (These--public or semi-public--include chambers of commerce, business development groups, tourism groups, etc. An EDO might focus on development in one community. Another might focus on a single subject, such as tourism, agriculture, historic preservation, etc., that crosses geographic and other boundaries. Some groups do both.)
- SBA: U. S. Small Business Administration. Listed separately due to its special role with SWFRDC.
- SWFEDC: Southwest Florida Economic Development Coalition. Listed separately due to its role as a regional group staffed by SWFRPC.
- SWFRDC: Southwest Florida Regional Development Corporation.
- Utilities: This includes public and private providers of various physical infrastructure components.

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