



# Economic Development Strategic Plan

provided to



presented by  
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# Introduction

Taylor County, Florida, known as the “Tree Capital of the South,” has an opportunity to re-establish and reinvent itself in the timber industry, as opportunities exist to use existing infrastructure, an experienced and knowledgeable labor force, and a long history in this industry to forecast how Commissioners may want to engage with as well as focus on industries and areas that would be most likely to drive job creation and reinvigorate the County.

A timber-rich environment that for over 70 years has boasted a sustainable annual supply of over three million tons of pine timber within roughly a one hour driving radius is exceedingly rare. Also rare is the high concentration of skilled labor in Taylor County, perpetuated in large part by Big Bend Technical College with its wide range of in-demand technical training programs designed to produce job-ready graduates equipped with the skills that industries need today. Even more rare is the readily available supply of critical utility infrastructure (i.e. historical consumptive use water permit of 45 million gallons per day (GPD) and 50 megawatts (MW) of power) which offers advantages when compared to competing rural communities across the state and Southeast United States.

The global cellulose fiber market is evolving as “cellulose manufacturers are searching for eco-friendly and biodegradable fiber alternatives to those derived from petrochemicals” (“Cellulose Fiber Market: Growth Opportunities & Forecast to 2034”). The market is likely very much aware of the unique situation in Taylor County and any strategic pivot would allow for the continuation of wood processing activities and job creation, if not at the former Georgia Pacific (GP) and West Fraser facilities, then elsewhere in the County, all while purposefully diversifying and aligning with market needs and sustainability practices.

This strategic plan is the result of extensive community engagement, research, outreach, and hands on experience while working with the State, County, and Taylor County Development Authority (TCDA) over the past 18 months. It reflects the input of local stakeholders, including business leaders, government officials, educational institutions, and residents. By collaborating with key partners and focusing on Taylor County’s strengths and potential, this plan provides a roadmap to achieving sustainable economic development and cites the many state and federal resources that may be available to attract industries and incentivize businesses wishing to locate and expand in Taylor County. It also provides options that the County and prospective businesses may consider for Taylor County moving forward, as Taylor County continues to use its Vision 2060 plan as a guiding principle for the future of the County. This plan will help lay out the preliminary foundation of an economic development strategy (with light references to tourism and housing elements, which require a separate focus) that will unlock the true potential of Taylor County, providing a sustainable future for all residents.

The purpose of this plan is to outline a clear and actionable path for economic development over roughly the next five years. It is designed to address both the opportunities and challenges that Taylor County faces in its recovery and pursuit of growth. The initial goal is to first stabilize Taylor County's economy after massive losses, focusing and capitalizing on the "lowest hanging fruit" opportunities that could help kickstart momentum in the way of job creation, investment in the community, and population growth. It establishes a strategic focus on economic diversification, creating a variety of employment opportunities for all residents of Taylor County.

This economic development strategic plan aims to achieve four objectives:

- Support the expansion of existing businesses by providing resources, infrastructure improvements, and business-friendly policies.
- Summarize potential future uses of the closed facilities as well as other business expansion opportunities throughout the County.
- Provide a market/industry analysis that will identify target industries to focus on in the near term.
- Provide an overview of the federal and state programs that will enhance the ability of the County to continue to recover and, at the same time, compete for jobs and businesses.

# Vision, Mission

Taylor County is ready to build on its strengths and rise to meet the challenges and opportunities of the future. This strategic plan is our commitment to ensuring that we move forward with purpose, innovation, and a shared vision for success.

The authors of this report believe it is fitting to cite the Vision Statement that provides the context for what Taylor County will have achieved by the year 2060 by the continued implementation of the Taylor County Vision 2060 Plan, which remains a cornerstone to economic growth and policy.

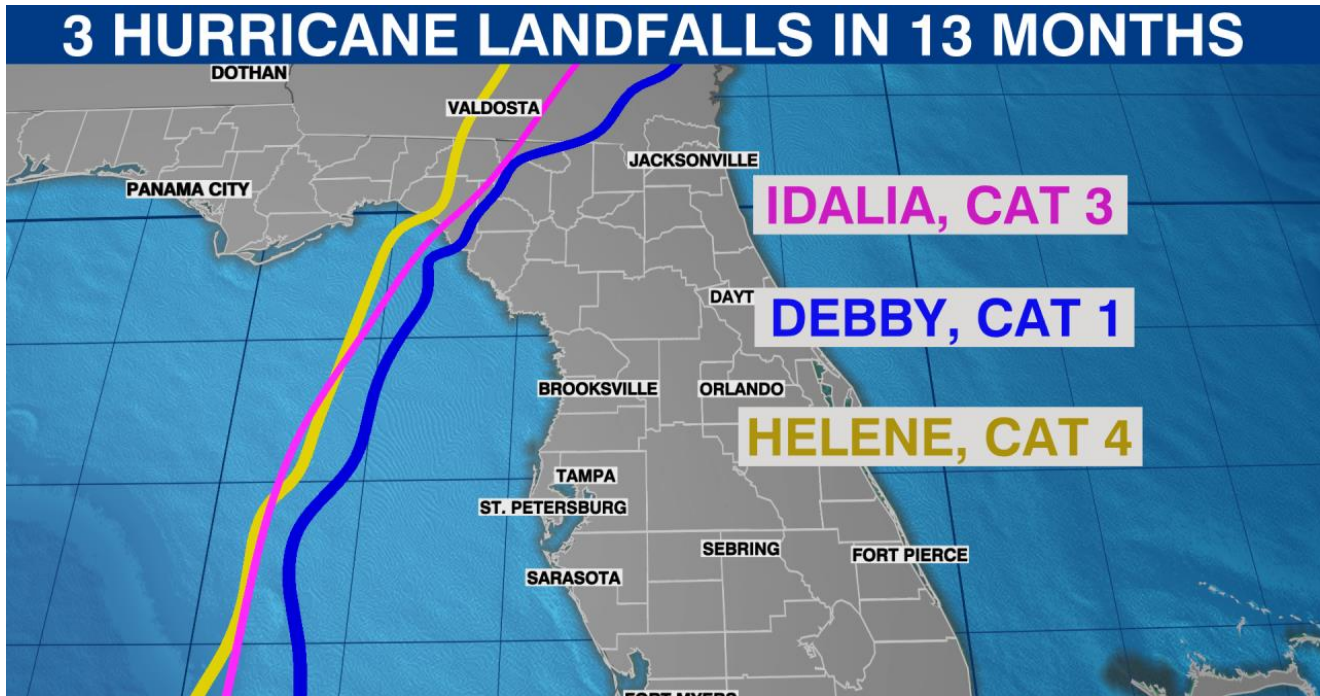
“By the year 2060, citizens of Taylor County should be able to describe their county and communities in these terms:

Taylor County is a harmonious community which has been able to maintain its rural and small-town character and quality of life. Taylor County is a community committed to community-wide excellence in its educational, medical, employment, and recreational opportunities. We pride ourselves in our respect for our tradition and heritage and we are excited about our future.

We have been able to manage our growth and protect our natural resources environment and small-town atmosphere. Through growth management and ongoing planning, Taylor County has become a county of opportunity. We have well planned and fully serviced centers of economic activity which provide jobs, goods, and services for the entire region. We have a variety of fully served residential villages with protected open spaces which reflect our rural heritage. Our living places and workplaces are connected by well designed, functional transportation corridors. Our air is clear, and our water is pure. Our historic heritage as the “Tree Capital of the South” has been preserved through careful and thoughtful planning. To sustain our growth and our quality of life, every public and private action is strictly judged by its impact on our natural and manmade environment and on our overall quality of life.”

This strategic vision and mission, supported by well-defined goals, will guide Taylor County’s path to economic development, ensuring that future growth is aligned with the community’s values and aspirations for a prosperous and sustainable future.

# Economic Overview



(Source: WFLA)

The Economic Overview assessment for Taylor County balances a reactive and proactive approach as addressing the essential reparations that will allow the County to recover from significant hurricane damage and economic losses is of utmost importance at this time. Key improvements are being investigated and also underway at the waterfront with the recent U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) approval for dredging the federal channel along with the replacement of the damaged channel markers and docks, resurrecting the fishing and boating recreation industries and, thus, the businesses that support them. There is also a need to find funding for significant improvements to critical water, wastewater, and communication system infrastructure and public safety buildings throughout Taylor County. Increased access to broadband has changed the quality of life and business for the better, and the focus on improving road infrastructure in the aftermath of major weather events is underway, which will help with business continuity efforts. Additionally, the Perry Foley Airport offers numerous opportunities to enhance its potential on the economic development front and provide for a higher revenue stream for that enterprise within the County.

From a stakeholder standpoint, it's all hands-on deck in terms of support. This was exemplified at an Economic and Disaster Recovery Funding Workshop held on May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2025 at the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) office where a number of stakeholder partners like FDEP, FloridaCommerce, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Florida Rural Water Association (FRWA), Southeast Rural Community Assistance Project, Inc. (SERCAP), North Florida Professional Services (NFPS), among others, came together to address the pressing needs of the County, primarily within the City of Perry, and find solutions to resolve them.

This effort was aimed to support the approximately \$400 million in long-term recovery funds (CDBG-DR) that Florida Commerce is expecting for storm specific tie back improvements, like water, sewer, stormwater, roads, and gas lines. The expected launch date for this grant program is October 2025 and highlights of those discussions are weaved throughout this portion of the strategic plan.

## Power

Duke Energy is one of America's largest energy holding companies and is executing an ambitious energy transition, keeping customer reliability and value at the forefront as it builds a smarter energy future. The company is investing in major electric grid upgrades and cleaner power generation, including natural gas, nuclear, renewables, and energy storage. Its coverage area encompasses primarily the City of Perry (including the former West Fraser Sawmill), the Perry Foley Airport, and the physical mill site (not the surrounding land) at the former GP facility. Due to the closures of the GP and West Fraser facilities, there is up to 50MW of power readily available and looking for a home. This is unheard of in most economic development circles and one that will prove advantageous with business recruitment to the area as it greatly shortens the lead time for initial power generation at a site. Duke has invested heavily in Taylor County's economic future with their site readiness program completed at the Gram's Legacy site and now also recently launched at the City of Perry 50 acre site.

Tri-County Electric Cooperative, a member-owned utility, provides electricity to a substantial portion of Taylor County that would include the land surrounding the physical GP site and nearly all of Four Rivers Land and Timber 350,000+ acre holdings throughout the County. Known for its competitive rates and customer-focused services, like access to 100% broadband fiber to the home network, Tri-County is primed for extensive growth as economic development efforts translate to more opportunities for businesses and housing throughout the County. Through their cooperative relationship with Duke Energy, Tri-County Electric is well-equipped to accommodate high-energy demands, ensuring that businesses requiring substantial power can be adequately supported, no matter the location in Taylor County.

## Water and Wastewater

Taylor County's water and wastewater infrastructure needs significant upgrades to support future growth and economic development. Reliable access to municipal water and sewer services is a critical factor for businesses considering relocation, making these improvements essential for attracting new industries. The City of Perry, along with the Suwannee River Water Management District and the St. Johns River Water Management District, play a key role in providing and managing these utilities. As expansion efforts continue, extending municipal water and sewer to key development sites will enhance the County's ability to accommodate business investment and ensure long-term sustainability.

Perry's water system faces challenges from outdated infrastructure that is prone to hurricane impacts. Reliance on old wells and treatment facilities (some dating back to 1941 and the 1950s) is unsustainable, with these plants producing substandard water and increasing operations and maintenance costs. High levels of Total Organic Carbon (TOC) and iron in the water require intensive treatment. Also, obsolete asbestos water mains, comprising 60% of the distribution network, are particularly vulnerable, with breaks during hurricanes threatening water supply. All the line breaks that were observed during the recent hurricanes were asbestos.

Solutions to these challenges involve improving and hardening water infrastructure to ensure continuous service and community safety, enhancing the system's resilience. Plans include acquiring new well sites and constructing

new water wells for a reliable and redundant supply, designing and constructing a new water treatment plant to replace outdated facilities and improve treatment, and strategically replacing vulnerable asbestos concrete lines. These replacements, along with improvements to fire hydrants and water system valves in areas with replaced pipes, will further enhance system reliability.

Perry's wastewater system faces significant capacity constraints due to high inflow and infiltration (I/I). This situation is exacerbated during hurricanes, and following the two recent hurricanes, the wastewater treatment facility (WWTF) has been handling flows up to three times its 1.25 MGD permitted capacity on a regular basis. This overcapacity results in Sanitary Sewer Overflows (SSOs), posing major threats to public health, sanitation, and the environment.

The GP Mill closure has further strained effluent disposal, as all treated effluent now goes to a single spray field in lieu of the papermill, straining its capacity, especially during high groundwater seasons. Increased flows have also impacted biosolids management, with existing drying beds being too small. These issues led to a FDEP warning for exceeding effluent disposal limits and present a significant economic challenge, hindering the city's ability to accept new wastewater users or industrial development.

Solutions focus on enhancing the WWTF, improving the effluent disposal system, and enhancing biosolids treatment and management to ensure the wastewater system can adequately function during and after disruptive events. Collection system strategies include cleaning and Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) inspection, rehabilitation to reduce I/I, and lift station rehabilitation to prevent SSOs. These integrated efforts will secure environmental compliance and public health, and free up essential treatment capacity for economic development.

## Stormwater

Perry experiences significant flooding during heavy rain due to an inadequate stormwater drainage system. This system results in critical transportation arteries (e.g., Julia Street Bridge, Main Street Bridge) being impacted by undersized drainage infrastructure, impeding emergency response and recovery. Natural drainage pathways are hindered by debris blockages, and several streets flood, compounding infrastructure issues.

A comprehensive Stormwater Planning and Preparation Study is underway to identify and prioritize projects for improved drainage and flood mitigation, enhancing the City's resilience to heavy rain events. The study's results will inform a Capital Investment Plan (CIP) list for stormwater improvements, including resizing culverts at flood-prone bridges and enhancing natural drainage through creek maintenance.

## Natural Gas

The City of Perry Gas Department is a local, municipal-owned natural gas distribution company that has been serving the community since 1953 providing for tremendous flexibility, reliability, and quality service. This asset is very advantageous for the community in helping attract and retain commercial and industrial customers.

## Broadband

Broadband infrastructure is an essential part of an economic development strategy. Reliable internet connectivity is critical to attracting businesses, supporting remote work, enhancing educational opportunities, and enabling telehealth services—all of which contribute to a vibrant and resilient economy. In partnership with Conexon Connect, a leading provider of fiber internet services, Tri-County Electric has closed the common digital divide

often felt in more rural areas and enabled its members access to high-speed internet through its 100% fiber-to-the-home network, while a large portion of those out of the Tri-County Electric network are served by Comcast. The remaining underserved areas will be addressed once the state releases assigned broadband funding later this year. Broadband fiber has greatly improved the quality of life, speed of business, and most importantly, educational opportunities, with the Florida Virtual School (FLVS) being among the greatest beneficiaries.

## Rail

The Georgia & Florida Railway (GFRR), managed by OmniTRAX, operates 20 miles of railroad in Taylor County and provides the benefits of rail across approximately 222 miles of track between Albany, Georgia, and northwestern Florida, with a southern terminus at the former GP facility. The GFRR interchanges with CSXT at Thomasville and Quitman, Georgia, and interchanges with Norfolk Southern (NS) at Adel and Albany Georgia, providing customers dual access to these carriers. Complementing its online rail and services, GFRR offers customers and the local southwestern Georgia and northwestern Florida community access to the benefits of rail via three primary product lines: Rail-Ready Sites that locate new customers, Transloads that bring rail to customers not on the railroad, and Car Storage and Services. The West Fraser site is also rail served by GFRR and there are opportunities to extend rail service to the Gram's Legacy site, City of Perry site, and select Four Rivers' holdings in the County. Rail development costs are running roughly about \$3M a mile so any extension of services would have to be demand driven.

## Roads

Taylor County's road infrastructure has always served as a robust foundation for economic development with well-connected routes that enhance accessibility and support industry needs. Perry, Florida was once a significant traffic corridor due to its location at the intersection of major highways and the presence of the railroad line. While the corridor's importance has diminished with the construction of interstates, it still serves as a crucial link in Florida's transportation network and continuous upgrades to the road infrastructure will be required.

Many streets are in poor condition which hinder emergency and recovery vehicle access. Hurricanes have accelerated road degradation, and the ability to quickly clear roads and ensure access to critical infrastructure (e.g., water and wastewater facilities) post-hurricane is limited. Street repaving and sidewalk repairs will improve road conditions for daily commerce and post-disaster logistics, aiding in recovery efforts. Plans also include improving infrastructure accessibility for rapid utility crew response after hurricanes.

## Airport

Perry Foley Airport, just three miles south of Perry and approximately 50 miles southeast of Tallahassee, serves the general aviation needs of the local community and is an excellent self-service refueling stop for transient aircraft going to or coming from the west and northwest. With its three intersecting runways, the airport can accommodate most general aviation aircraft. The airport's terminal is ideal for serving local users as well as those visiting the area and primarily supports corporate/business flight activity. The airport also regularly supports sport/recreational flying, forestry operations, medical flights, agricultural operations, power line and pipeline inspection activity, aerial surveying, and flight training. The airport spans over 862 acres and has three runways, including a primary runway of 5,013 feet that accommodates a wide range of aircraft, except for military planes. The airport sells self-service 100LL and JET A fuels and is also equipped with ample development space, making it an attractive option for businesses seeking accessible and flexible aviation infrastructure for cargo and

corporate use. The airport is undergoing a runway realignment project with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) and recently entered into an agreement with FDOT to use the facility for staging in the event of hurricanes. The airport was also recently awarded a Rural Infrastructure Fund (RIF) grant for AVGAS and has had a few opportunities for significant development in recent years which ultimately did not materialize but displayed more possible diverse income streams to the facility.

Presently, there is an out of state company that is looking to establish a significant size aircraft maintenance and recycling facility that would be an ideal fit for the former Proctor & Gamble corporate maintenance and operations hangar. This is the airport's second largest hangar with roughly 8000sf of high bay indoor aircraft parking area and over 2000sf of office, workshop, and storerooms and currently houses Taylor County Fire personnel and trucks. There is an effort to build the Taylor County Fire Department a safer category storm rated building to house the fire personnel and trucks and once completed, the 10,000sf hangar can be turned back over to the airport and utilized in its intended purpose as a maintenance hangar.

In terms of expansion and additional revenue potential, the essential utilities are in place, but the restrictions and red tape brought about by the Federal Aviation Authority (FAA) hampers revenue and growth opportunities at the airport. For example, you cannot mow on airport property (and therefore sell it) as the FAA will not allow it. The FAA also places heavy restrictions on land that could be used for economic development (the southeast side of the facility is most ideal). The County would like to take control of those areas to alleviate some of the restrictions as there is enough tenant demand to support the construction of up to two 100ft X 100ft hangars. The timing on removing the parcels from FAA authority to the County would be dependent on the airport master plan revision which is updated every 10 years, and the current version is set to expire in 2027. The airport could realize immediate revenue increases if it moved the FAA Remote Control Air to Ground (RCAG) equipment onto the airport instead of a remote field where it is today, purchase/lease a jet fuel truck which they currently do not have and badly need as they turn down planes and helicopters regularly looking to fuel up there, and replace its 12kG jet fuel tank with a 15kG tank (~\$2M cost; the 12kG to 15kG AVGAS tank replacement is currently underway).

## Education

The Taylor County School District plays a vital role in not only shaping the local workforce but also serves as a means through which the community continues to strengthen and rally support. Operating under the "3 C's" platform of Communication, Collaboration, and Care, the efforts by the district are making significant strides in the lives of Taylor County's student population providing guidance, discipline, and love which directly impacts the area's economic growth. Serving a diverse population, the district is committed to enhancing educational outcomes, both in the classroom and out, thereby equipping students with the skills necessary to meet industry demands. The Taylor County school district is currently rated a "C+" and is making every effort toward becoming an "A" district through continuous community collaboration with local employers, increasing CTE certifications, encouraging participation in after school activities, and fostering a strong athletic program. Passionate faculty, community business partnerships and participation, strong discipline with both students and faculty, and student self-motivation are the recipe to success. Infrastructure needs remain paramount after nearly all buildings needed roof replacement after the three hurricanes in 2023-24, and the half cent sales tax proposed on the upcoming 2026 referendum will be of great help moving forward, should it pass. A strong educational foundation serves as a cornerstone for long-term economic growth and the development of a skilled, well-rounded workforce.

## Post-Secondary Education

Taylor County is proud to host two premier post-secondary institutions that play a pivotal role in workforce development and economic growth:

North Florida College (NFC) – NFC is a member of the Florida College System and accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. It is the smallest public college in the State of Florida but casts a wide net in terms of area as it serves the distinct educational needs of both traditional and nontraditional students of its six-county district, including Hamilton, Jefferson, Lafayette, Madison, Suwannee, and Taylor counties. NFC offers a wide range of associate degrees, vocational training, and certification programs and provides local access to higher education, allowing students to pursue degrees in fields like business, healthcare, education, and technology without leaving the community. NFC has a matriculation agreement with the Taylor County School Board and offers a Dual Enrollment program that allows students to earn college credits while still in high school at no cost.

Big Bend Technical College (BBTC) – BBTC's industry-certified instructors are best in class and offer a range of vocational and technical programs aimed at preparing students for high-demand careers. With certification programs in fields such as welding, HVAC, electrical and instrumentation, commercial truck driving, and health sciences, BBTC equips students with industry-recognized credentials and apprenticeship and internship pipelines. The college's partnerships with local employers provide flexible employer-driven training solutions for upskilling/reskilling employees and training that aligns with workforce needs, fostering direct pathways from education to employment.

## Healthcare

Taylor County's healthcare offerings are among its greatest assets and strengths moving forward as Doctor's Hospital is not only a strong and growing employer to its residents, but also greatly benefits the community by providing exceptional preventative care, maintenance care, rehabilitation, and so much more, eliminating the need to travel outside the County. To remain competitive, the facility has made significant improvements to its emergency room, modernizing the space and making it more welcoming to its patients. However, the hospital could use additional funding to support training initiatives and scholarships, along with the purchase of new MRI equipment, a whole building generator, water purification system, and expansion of its telehealth program.

## Strategic Relationships

Taylor County's strategic relationships play a pivotal role in shaping the community's economic landscape as the collective and unified efforts are paramount to creating a business-friendly environment where processes are streamlined and barriers to entry are minimized. Internally, County government, local municipalities and communities, TCDA, Perry-Taylor and Steinhatchee Chambers of Commerce, along with regional and state organizations like the Northeast Florida Economic Development Partnership (NFEDP), FloridaCommerce, CareerSource, and the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) work collaboratively to align economic development priorities. This cooperation is evident in joint efforts to secure grant funding for critical projects, including water, sewer, and healthcare infrastructure upgrades, downtown revitalization, workforce development, and entrepreneurship. Regular communication among stakeholders ensures that initiatives are strategic, coordinated, and reflective of the community's needs.

## Employment Rates

With Florida's unemployment rate at 3.7% as of April 2025 (The Florida Scorecard), Taylor County's unemployment rate of 6.1% (The Florida Scorecard) is significantly above the state and national rate of 4.2% according to recent Bureau of Labor Statistics (2025) data. This reflects the area's need for job growth and economic diversification.

## Income Levels

The median household income in Taylor County is \$48,855 (FloridaCommerce) and is lower than the state average, \$66,284 annually (FloridaCommerce), reflecting the need for higher-paying job opportunities in the region. A large portion of the County's workforce is employed in manufacturing, retail, healthcare and social services, and public administration.

## Quality of Life

Taylor County's small-town charm and abundant natural resources create an appealing environment for residents and businesses alike. Once plentiful opportunities for outdoor recreation only enhance the community's lifestyle and the effort to resurrect the facilities to support those activities is underway. The County's rich heritage is reflected throughout, fostering a sense of pride and connection among residents. Access to exceptional nearby healthcare facilities, educational institutions, and Florida in its most natural state further supports the County's livability and appeal. Planned improvements, such as revitalizing the downtown district and expanding infrastructure, aim to enhance quality of life while fostering economic growth. These efforts continue to underscore Taylor County's commitment to providing a thriving, family-friendly environment that attracts both residents and businesses. Despite the above, the region faces enormous challenges, from significant infrastructure improvements, affordable housing, and basic amenities in some areas to simply meet the demands of a modern economy.

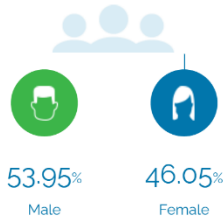
Taylor County is a rural community with a small and unfortunately shrinking population that stands at approximately 21,689 residents. The demographic composition of Taylor reflects a relatively diverse community, with a median age in line with that of the state at 41. Population loss has been relatively modest despite the hardships the community has faced, with decreases driven by mainly out migration due to loss of employment and housing.

## People

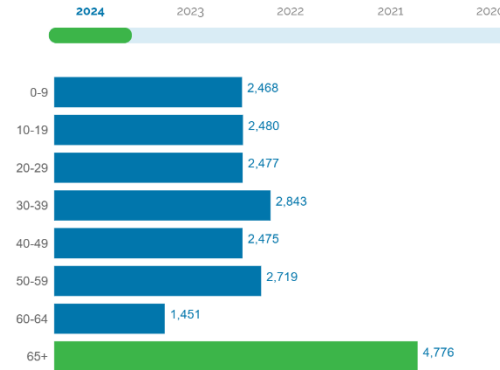
The total population of Taylor County is 21,689. The median age is 41.31

21,689

Total Population



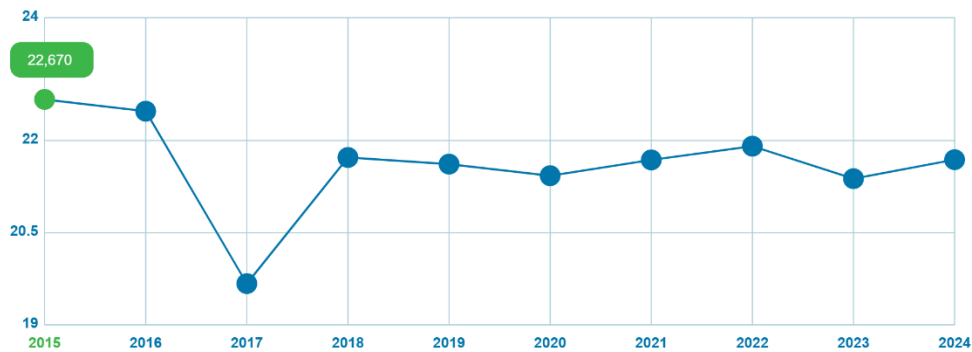
### Age Distribution



### Median Age

41

### Population Growth (in thousands)



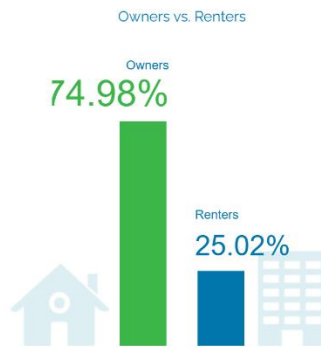
(Source: Applied Geographic Solutions & FT Locations 2024, TaxFoundation.Org 2021)

## Housing

Adequate housing to support not only the anticipated growth in the workforce but also the current workforce has become a greater issue in recent years due to the damage from the storms. The need for additional rental product is evident with 50 percent more households owning their homes in Taylor County than renting. Working with developers and local partners to implement a housing strategy ensures the availability of affordable, modern housing options, increasing the availability of affordable housing for low and middle-income families. This could be accomplished by encouraging and incentivizing the development of diverse housing types, including single-family homes, townhouses, and apartments, to meet the needs of different demographics and promoting mixed-use developments that blend residential, commercial, and recreational spaces to create vibrant, walkable communities.

## Housing

There are 50% more households who own their homes than there are renters.



(Source: Applied Geographic Solutions & FT Locations 2024, TaxFoundation.Org 2021)

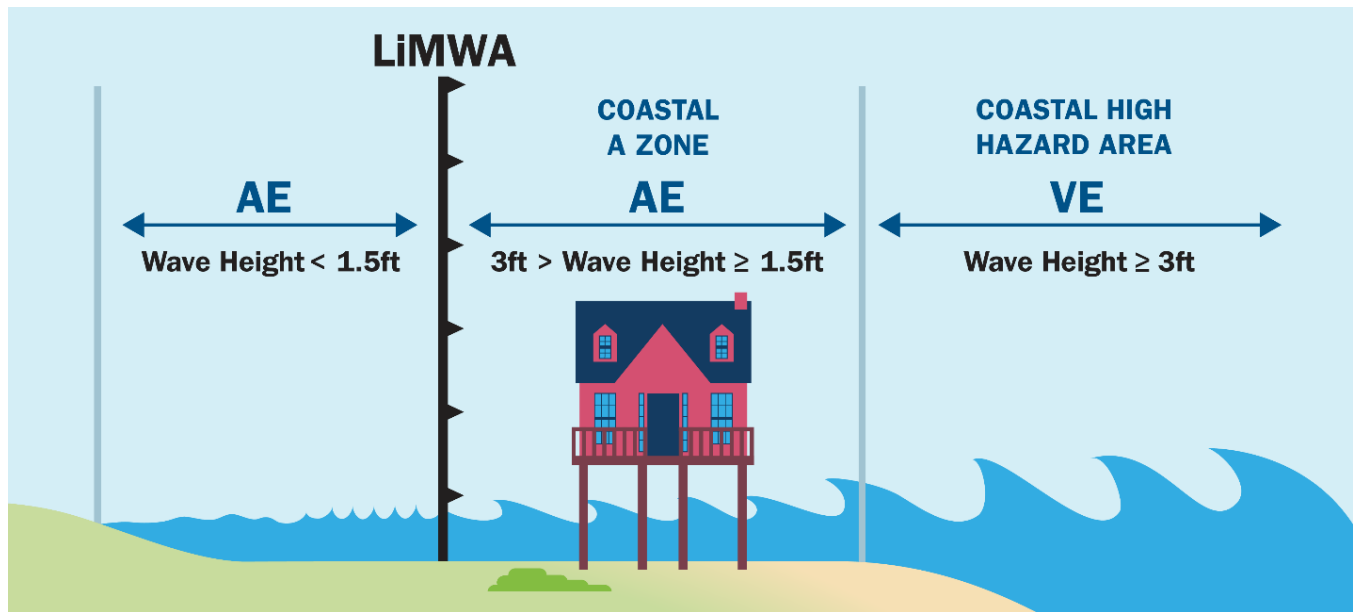
## Waterfront

Taylor County has the longest undeveloped coastline in Florida which will, for the most part, remain so due to previously implemented conservation easements. Of the waterfront areas that are developed, the communities of Steinhatchee and Keaton Beach suffered tremendous losses in the wake of Hurricanes Idalia, Debby, and Helene and the areas are slow to recover, with some remaining questionable as of this publication as to how much can realistically be rebuilt.

Scallop season (June 15th-Labor Day) is crucial to Taylor County's economy from a revenue standpoint and the effort to rebuild the many floating docks, repair the channel markers, and dredge the federal channel to support the industry is currently underway. From a commercial fishing perspective, it would be ideal to have an offloading site in Taylor County as there is not one at present. To do this, a site that conforms to many state and federal regulations and a working dock is needed. Fuel at the dock would be advantageous as well, but there is uncertainty around the hard and fast rule on selling fuel in certain FEMA zones. The Hagans Cove Project was brought up multiple times in public meetings for this strategic plan and can hopefully be resurrected to support an additional offloading and waterfront access site. Prime waterfront adjacent to what was Roy's restaurant (now food truck) in Steinhatchee, and the Four Rivers-owned waterfront site in Keaton Beach could also be very viable economic opportunities as well.

Keaton Beach no longer has any sit-down restaurants, only a food truck operated by Beach Bums, and they also lost their only grocery store, effectively making it a food desert after all facilities were destroyed by the recent hurricanes. At present, the federal and state requirements and programs available appear largely prohibitive toward any effort to rebuild but conversations are ongoing. Steinhatchee has a Family Dollar which provides a limited amount of grocery items but, outside of that, residents and visitors have to travel many miles into the City of Perry to shop at a full-scale grocery store.

Housing for visitors and workers all over, but especially near the waterfront, is a problem as there are issues with the rebuild requirements, i.e. 25% match, flood insurance in perpetuity, etc. Elevate Florida, a state program to help homeowners elevate flood-prone homes, does not include projects in the FEMA VE zone, which comprises basically all of Keaton Beach to Cedar Island. The program focuses on elevating homes, but in the FEMA VE zone



(Source: FEMA.gov)

(Coastal High Hazard Area), Mitigation Reconstruction is not eligible. Structures in these zones are more likely to require a more extensive elevation or acquisition-demolition.

## Downtown Revitalization

Taylor County faces significant challenges with areas of blight that hinder both economic development and quality of life. Deteriorated and neglected properties not only diminish the County's appeal but also pose safety concerns and limit opportunities for new investments. These conditions often discourage businesses and residents from relocating or staying in the area, perpetuating cycles of disinvestment. Efforts to address these issues are essential to unlocking the County's full potential. Revitalization projects can transform blighted areas into vibrant community spaces, enhance property values, and attract new businesses. Strategic initiatives, such as improving infrastructure, beautifying public spaces, and repurposing underutilized properties, will foster community pride and economic growth. By collaborating with stakeholders, Taylor County can leverage available resources and funding to systematically tackle these challenges. Recognizing the importance of revitalization, the City of Perry has partnered with Retail Strategies to develop a downtown retail district visioning plan. This initiative, in tandem with the newly formed Downtown Merchants Association led by the Perry-Taylor Chamber of Commerce, aims to breathe new life into the heart of Perry by creating a dynamic, engaging downtown area. This forward-thinking effort reflects a commitment to progress and offers hope for a brighter, more prosperous future for the City of Perry and Taylor County by improving the curb appeal of the downtown along with new welcome signs at the County lines to make the area more inviting. Funding opportunities for these efforts are being explored and resurfacing US 19 toward the shopping district would only enhance the effort further.

# Retention & Analysis of Business Needs and Challenges

Retention is the foundational principle surrounding an effective economic development strategy. More time and resources should always be invested in retention over recruitment efforts due to the need to protect and preserve Taylor County's tax base. To systematically address the needs of local businesses, Taylor County (in collaboration with the TCDA) should develop a formal Business Retention initiative. This will focus on identifying and addressing the needs of local businesses, fostering relationships with key employers, and ensuring that businesses receive the support they need to remain in the County and expand their operations. Outside of the forest products industry sector, Taylor County has much to be proud of in the way of retention, experiencing several business expansions in the past year, specifically in the manufacturing sector, which always have a sizable multiplier effect in terms of additional jobs to a community. Nammo, Big Top, and Super Pufft are all experiencing significant growth, helping offset the losses in employment elsewhere and thanks to transferrable skill sets exhibited by the local workforce.

Moving forward, Taylor County businesses must overcome several challenges that hinder their ability to expand, including those related to inadequate infrastructure, such as limited access to water, wastewater, and power primarily outside of the City of Perry limits. Workforce retention is also a constant challenge as recruiting and retaining workers with specialized skills in advanced manufacturing and healthcare are always in very high demand. Finally, access to strategic support like financing and grants, particularly for small businesses and startups, is limited creating unnecessary barriers when trying to grow operations.

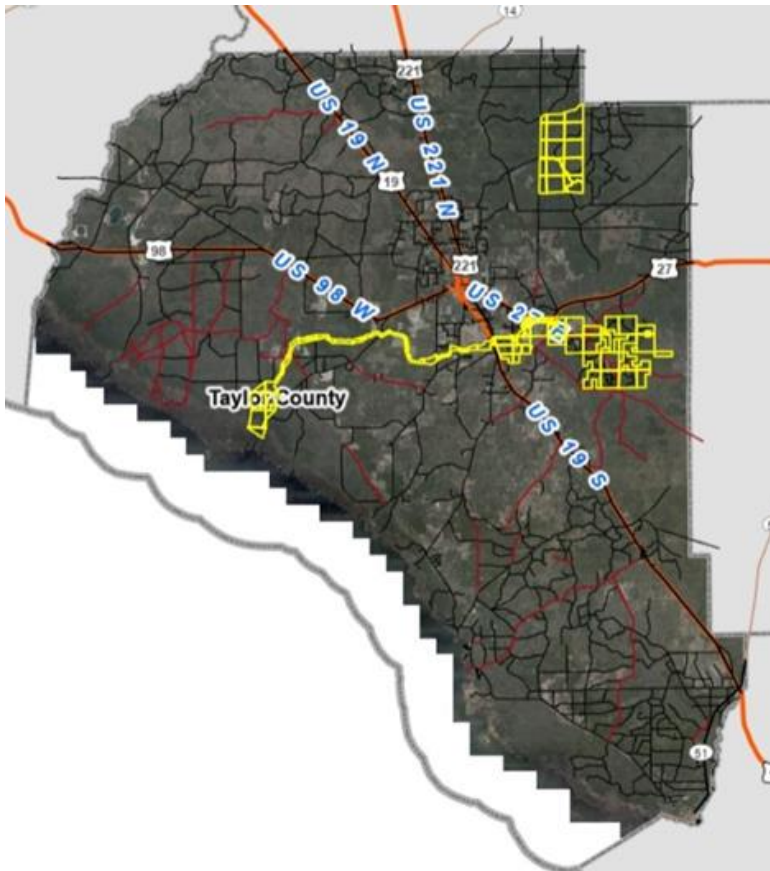
Taylor County must continue to focus on initiatives that support and strengthen its existing businesses while creating an environment conducive to their expansion. Strategies to accomplish this include:

- **Infrastructure Improvements:** Addressing critical infrastructure gaps, such as additional Gulf access points, airport hangar space, water and wastewater capacity, and when needed, road and rail connectivity will create an environment where businesses can thrive and grow.
- **Workforce Development:** Taylor County is doing exceptionally well on this front, but collaborating further with local educational institutions to offer even more targeted training and CTE programs will help bridge workforce gaps and appeal to a healthy cross section of the current and future workforce and businesses.
- **Business Incentives and Grants:** Offering targeted incentives and grant opportunities can encourage businesses to expand and invest further in the community. Programs that support capital investments, job creation, and innovation will encourage business retention and growth.
- **Small Business Development Center (SBDC):** Establishing a satellite SBDC office in Taylor County will be a great resource for businesses looking to start and/or expand.

# Site Inventory

Catalytic developable sites form the bedrock of Taylor County's economic development recruitment strategy, providing prime opportunities to potential investors and businesses. Through the County's partnership with NFEDP, the GIS Planning/Zoom Prospector platform allows for a dynamic inventory that is regularly updated to include new properties, ensuring exposure to the County and allowing it to remain competitive and ready to meet the diverse needs of businesses across industries.

## Georgia Pacific Mill Site and Related Property



Although hard to envision at this stage, the GP Mill Site and related property could once again deliver one of the greatest benefits for Taylor County. According to the data the authors of this report have collected, it appears that the site will be, for the most part, pad ready with more than substantial utilities available to it, which may include a valuable discharge pipeline, all of which is a rare find in today's economic development climate. Given that the site has been in operation for decades, it will come to market essentially turnkey to manufacturers, many of whom are currently faced with long lead times related to sourcing critical infrastructure (transformers, water/wastewater, etc.). Having readily available utilities is an asset. It is likely that a heavy industrial end user will eventually select the site as there are relatively few areas in Florida (and beyond) that can not only support heavy industrial, but also fully embrace this type of use. Industry experts might analyze the repurposing of the Mill site into an alternative use facility, which

could help alleviate some of the intensive use of water, energy, and chemicals in the production of high-purity cellulose derivatives, thus helping to reduce environmental concerns while continuing the facility's use. One example could include conversion to something akin to a biomass or biofuel facility, given geographic synergies and wood basket/timber availability and the growing call to action for reduced reliance on coal and increased low-carbon fuel alternatives. An example would be woody biomass, which is used in a variety of applications from biochar for energy production to the development of sustainable, high-quality fish meal for the growing global aquaculture industry. If the end user is not in the wood manufacturing industry, steel and possibly food processing could be alternatives given the power and water demands that mirror the availability. As referenced in the Adams & Reese 2024 Environmental Report, the authors recommend keeping an open dialogue with the Mill representatives and explore all state and federal grant programs that may assist as the future of the site is determined.

A primary initiative of this strategic plan involves monitoring the closure, demolition, and remediation activities at the site for one calendar year. This effort just began and is being led by Mr. Chet Thompson, former Environmental Manager for the GP Mill, and his advisory services to the County will help with expectations moving forward on backfilling the site with an end user along with proper next steps.

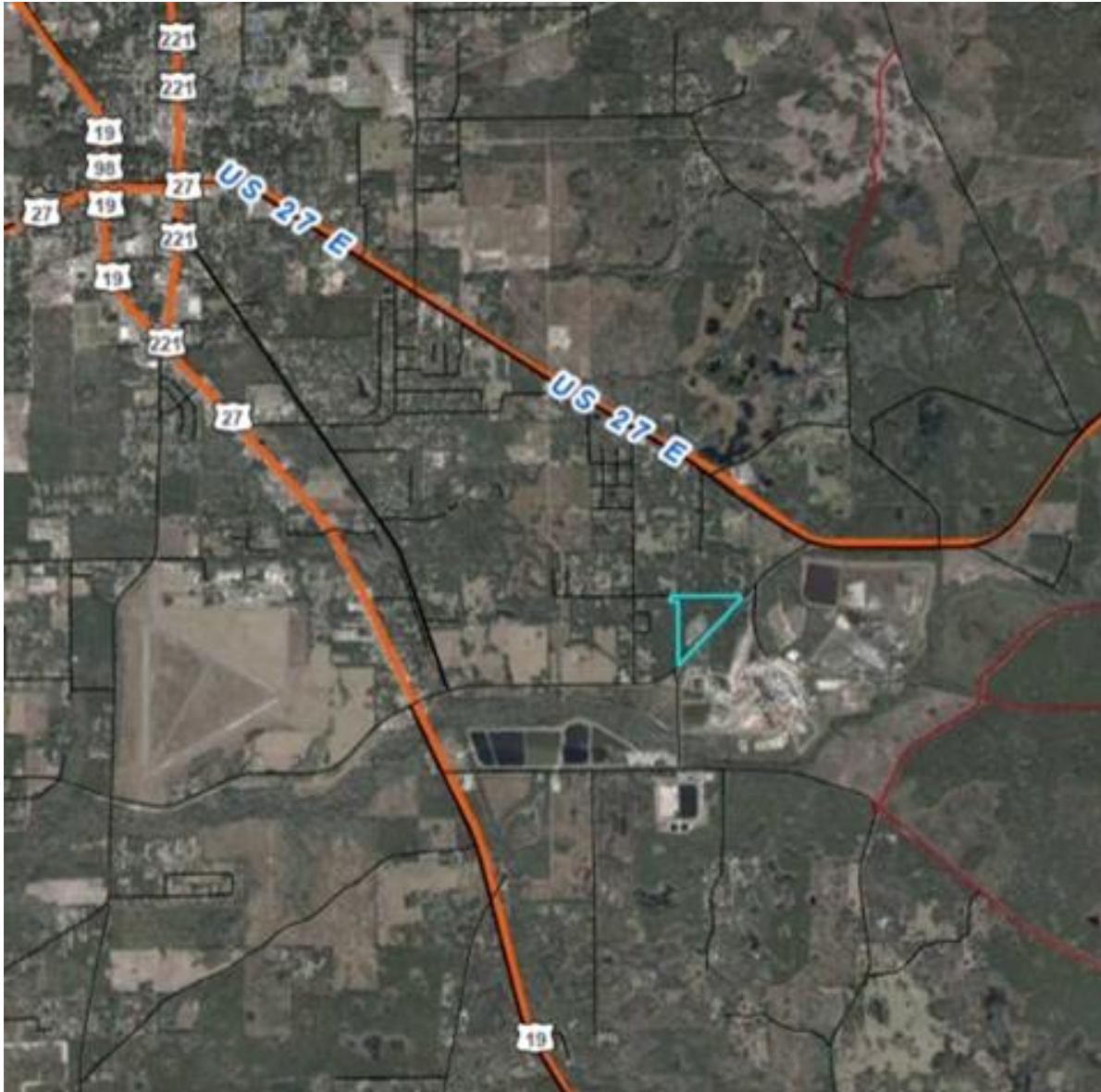
## West Fraser Site



For the past year, intentional focus by the corporate entity that owns the site was mainly on the re-allocation of assets to other West Fraser facilities while at the same time courting a buyer for the shuttered facility. As of this publication, a qualified buyer is under contract to purchase the site and should close the transaction very soon. There are many considerations in the works for the site but an ideal scenario for this property would be an industry akin to what it was prior to closing or a more traditional lumber mill, given the Southeast's dominance in the timber industry and increased demand both in residential construction and as part of the wave of mass timber projects coming to life (e.g. Under Armour's new mass timber Headquarters). Conversion into a biomass or biofuel facility could be an option here as well with changes to the existing setup and substantial investment in new machinery and equipment. As mentioned in the Adams & Reese 2024 Environmental Report, the site should be marketable given that FDEP issued a clean closure

letter. Any prospective purchaser of this property should be encouraged to explore opportunities under FDEP's Brownfields Redevelopment and Voluntary Cleanup Programs, which are available to encourage the voluntary cleanup and redevelopment of abandoned and underutilized commercial and industrial sites. Voluntary Cleanup Tax Credits (VCTC) are available to partially offset the costs of site rehabilitation and redevelopment through an offset of Florida corporate income tax. To utilize VCTC credits of up to \$500,000, the purchaser must enter a Brownfields Site Rehabilitation Agreement with FDEP. Florida's VCTC program received record funding in 2023 and 2024 from the Florida Legislature to encourage the growth of Brownfields redevelopment.

## City of Perry Acreage



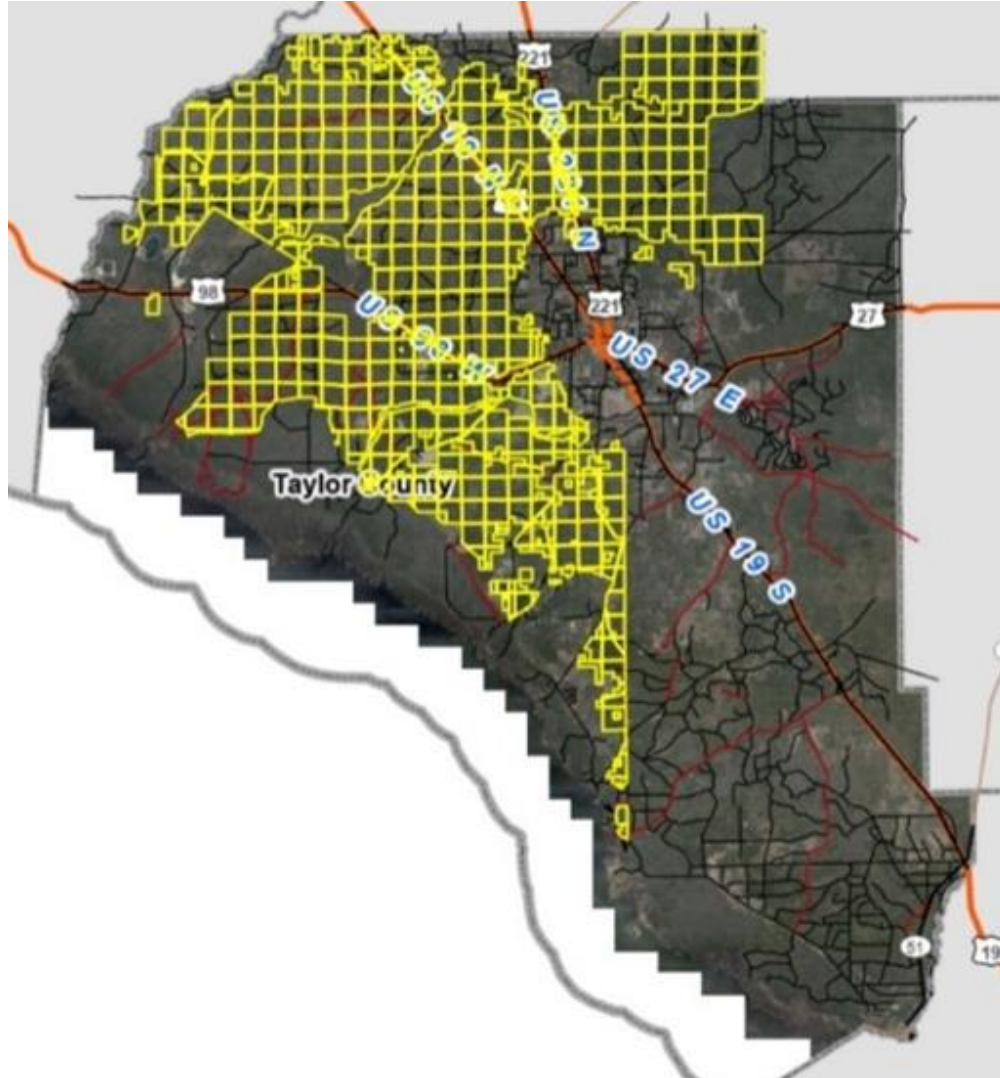
This prime, 50-acre site located outside of the city limits in the County on Foley Road across from the GP Mill is owned by the City of Perry and is one of the greatest opportunities in Taylor County for future economic development. The latest addition to Duke's Site Readiness Program, the site is in an Opportunity Zone, is zoned industrial, has industrial grade utilities available to the property (sanitary sewer being the only exception), can be rail served, and being city owned carries advantages often in grant funding. This site should be prioritized and marketed heavily to the economic development community for a single industrial user or several smaller industrial related users. The authors of this report recommend collaborating with the North Florida Economic Development Partnership (NFEDP), FloridaCommerce, and the site selection community to ensure visibility. Federal and state grant opportunities provided in this report and specific to the future end user could and should be leveraged here.

## Gram's Legacy Site



The Gram's Legacy Site is another sizeable industrial zoned acreage opportunity (272+/- acres) situated in central Taylor County, in the City of Perry specifically, that with relatively nominal improvements could be readily available for industrial development and job creation. The site is in an Opportunity Zone, is expected to receive FTZ status Q3 2025, and was the first in Taylor County to go through the Duke Readiness Program, all of which elevates and prepares it for significant economic development. Continuous collaboration with the property owner along with the NFEDP and FloridaCommerce has resulted in funding for improvements to the wastewater infrastructure. Further improvements (i.e. road ingress/egress, gas expansion, optional rail) for what could be one large, several medium, or many small users should be prioritized due to its location and ability to expand to up to 330 acres with adjacent acreage also available. Federal and state programs provided in this report could also assist.

## Four Rivers Land and Timber Holdings



Four Rivers Land and Timber holds the greatest responsibility and opportunity in terms of catalytic economic development in Taylor County. With land holdings of more than 350,000 acres in Taylor County alone, the decisions the company leadership will make moving forward will have a lasting impact on future generations of residents in terms of job growth and quality of life. That said, they have graciously released 3000 prime acres in northern Taylor County for the TCDA to market to industry for economic development purposes and are open to collaboration on their very desirable waterfront assets in Keaton Beach as well. The authors of this report recommend maintaining an open dialogue with the leadership team and working in lockstep with them on select parcels to craft a plan together that benefits the County and its residents. All industries mentioned in this report could be supported should they wish to reposition select timberland for commercial or industrial use, housing and tourism applications included.





# SWOT Analysis

## Strengths

- **Available Sites:** Significant repositioning of shuttered industrial assets with ample industrial grade utilities along with strategic timber holdings provide opportunities for exceptional business expansion. Further, the Perry Foley Airport offers advantages for new industry growth in Taylor County, aligning with that of the state's number one industry: Aerospace and Defense.
- **Skilled Workforce:** Taylor County has arguably the most highly sought after workforce skilled in the most demanding trade professions thanks in large part to Big Bend Technical College's exemplary CTE programs.
- **Location:** Taylor County's connectivity to major transportation corridors, including US 19, US 98, US 221, US 27, SR 51, and CR 359 provides direct access to I-10, Miami, and Steinhatchee.
- **Wood:** Although the market is not strong at present, historically providing over three million tons of pine timber for over 70 years is very attractive to the forest products industry, which is cyclical in nature and invariably will strengthen with time.
- **Community Commitment:** Strong collaboration and coordination between local municipalities, Chambers, regional and state stakeholders lend to a supportive development environment.
- **Quality of Life:** Tightknit community, historic downtown, miles and miles of pristine waterfront, and Florida untouched attract residents and businesses alike.

## Weaknesses

- **Economic Diversification:** Heavy reliance and focus for many decades on forest product manufacturing led to a lack of diversification in the economy.
- **Infrastructure Needs:** Hurricane ravaged coastline communities coupled with a significant loss in revenue across the board due to business closures is crippling the County's ability to make necessary improvements.
- **Workforce Housing Limitations:** Affordable housing is needed to resurrect and support increased business activity.

## Opportunities

- Revitalization Projects: Waterfront restoration and Downtown Perry beautification.
- Sustainable Energy: Alternative uses for forest products continue to grow in popularity.
- Significant Utilities: Up to 50MW of power readily available and looking for a home and a historical consumptive use water permit of 45 MGD is rare and highly valued to big industry.

## Threats

- Funding Shortfalls: High costs for infrastructure development and overall general operations and maintenance throughout the County could require significant support and investment from external partners until the economic situation has stabilized.
- State Incentives: Competitive states have very aggressive programs in place to attract businesses that would be an ideal fit for Taylor County.
- Bureaucracy and Legal Challenges: Advancements in high profile economic development initiatives could be delayed due to corporate bureaucracy and/or internal legal matters.

# Target Industries

- Wood/Materials
  - Forestry
  - Wood Products
  - Paper/Packaging
  - Recycling
  - Construction Products and Services
- Traditional Metals and Plastics
  - Metalworking Technology
  - Downstream Metal Products
  - Upstream Metal Manufacturing
  - Plastics
- Aerospace and Defense Manufacturing
  - Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul
  - Ammo Suppliers
- Transportation and Warehousing
- Food/Advanced Food
  - Food Processing and Manufacturing
  - Aquaculture\*
- Information Technology
  - Data Centers\*\*
- Energy/Utilities
  - Data Centers and Storage\*\*

### \*Aquaculture:

As the waterfront continues to be rebuilt and the industries that support it return, upland commercial aquaculture in the form of shellfish seed production through a hatchery is an interesting and creative concept that can be explored. The shellfish hatchery could support the clam and oyster aquaculture industry in Florida's Gulf of Mexico, allowing harvesters to access individual specimens that can be grown in different presentations. The hatchery project could include the production of seeds and partially cover the demand for the state industry, especially in surrounding counties like Levy and Wakulla. Such a project could welcome academic and private collaboration as well. The authors of this report recommend exploring any possible federal and/or state grant opportunities to help launch this effort and examples are included in this report.

### \*\*Data Centers and Storage:

Although not the closest in proximity to power generation along with recent weather events creating pause for the industry to advance in Florida as a whole, the authors of this report recommend pursuing the data center industry as a potential option because the industry can act as a job creator while delivering an enormous ad valorem boost. "The insatiable desire for data to improve business performance is driving the growth of the data center industry and data center providers cannot build enough new capacity to meet demand ("The Data Center Industry Is Booming | News & Insights | Gray"). As new applications for technologies, such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, continue to grow, so does the needs for next-generation strategies and technologies to transform how businesses and government store, manage, and move data." Having the needed infrastructure in place and readily available makes the opportunity that much more realistic.

# Workforce Development

A robust and adaptable workforce is a cornerstone of successful economic development. Taylor County's strength is its highly skilled and continuously replenishing workforce thanks in large part to the school district and its strong alignment with Big Ben Technical College and North Florida College. Taylor County's enviable ability to foster and develop skilled labor is essential to supporting the growth of local businesses and target industries and the colleges are laser focused on aligning programs with those that are a direct fit to the local employers' needs. To remain competitive, Taylor County must be continually thinking about ways to retain and attract both local and external talent. Key areas include ensuring that there are affordable housing options for workers and their families, establishing strong internship and apprenticeship programs through partnerships with local businesses and educational institutions, and quality of life initiatives, highlighting the small-town charm, relaxed waterfront, and abundant natural resources in recruitment campaigns aimed at drawing talent from larger urban centers.

# Support for Local Entrepreneurs & Small Business Development

Entrepreneurs and small businesses play an essential role in job creation and economic diversification. Taylor County must foster an environment that supports entrepreneurial ventures through the following measures:

- Small Business Development Center (SBDC) is the largest network of small business consultants in Florida. They provide access to no-cost consulting, affordable and high-quality resources, innovative tools, and the knowledge of a diverse network of small business experts. The SBDC does not have a local office or dedicated individual to assist in Taylor County at present, requiring residents and business owners to travel to Tallahassee to have an in-person consultation with an SBDC consultant. This can be changed as there is a willingness from the SBDC Tallahassee team to establish a satellite office in Taylor County and there may be creative ways to fund the effort as well.
- Small Business Incubators: Creating or partnering with small business incubators will provide emerging entrepreneurs with the resources they need to succeed, including equipment, mentorship, access to capital, and networking opportunities.
- Access to Capital: Expanding access to financing and business loans for local entrepreneurs will help stimulate small business development. If not already, local financial institutions should collaborate with FloridaCommerce on the State Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI) program, a Collateral Support Program that enables financing that might otherwise be unavailable due to a collateral shortfall. This credit enhancement uses public resources to encourage private lenders to lend money to businesses by providing a cash deposit as collateral for a business loan or credit facility and may be used to fund start-up costs, business procurement, franchise fees, equipment, inventory, and the purchase, construction, renovation, or tenant improvements of an eligible place of business.

# Marketing & Promotion

To position Taylor County as an ideal location for business investment and growth, a comprehensive marketing and promotion strategy creating a unified and compelling brand for Taylor County is critical to its success as a competitive destination for businesses. The branding and messaging will emphasize the County's rare and readily available infrastructure assets (power, water, wood), highly skilled workforce, strong community ties, and commitment to economic growth. Website upgrades and search engine optimization (SEO) enhancements, social media campaigns, targeted email marketing, print materials, presentations, and participating at specific trade shows and events will enhance its visibility, strengthen its reputation and brand as a business-friendly destination, and ultimately attract new investment and opportunities for growth.

# Incentives & Financial Assistance for Business

Taylor County offers a variety of local, state, and federal incentives designed to support businesses in establishing, expanding, and succeeding in the community. These programs provide financial advantages, streamlined processes, and resources that help reduce costs and promote long-term business success.

## Local Business Incentives:

Businesses in Taylor County can benefit from property tax abatements and an expedited permitting process, helping to lower initial development costs and timelines. The County collaborates with the TCDA to connect businesses with local resources and opportunities.

## Federal and State Programs that Enhance the Ability to Compete for Jobs

Herein is a non-exhaustive list of state and federal programs that could be utilized to help offset capital outlays should a company wish to pursue a site in Florida. These programs are all based on a variety of factors related to capital investment, job count, average wage, and other factors, and are tailored specifically to the user in question. There is no one-size-fits-all incentive package, nor are all incentives in some cases even labeled as such. The TCDA, NFEDP, and FloridaCommerce will help guide the discussions while working with Taylor County along with any other local, state, and federal partners to formulate a competitive incentive package.

## Summary of Current Florida Economic Development Programs and Tools

### Grant Programs

- Florida Job Growth Grant Fund – grants awarded for local public infrastructure and workforce training proposals that promote economic opportunity across the state.
- High Impact Performance Incentive – grants to spur capital investment and job creation, reserved for major facilities operating in designated high-impact sectors.

### Tax Credits

- Capital Investment Tax Credit – used to attract and grow capital-intensive industries operating in a designated high-impact portion of the following sectors in Florida: advanced manufacturing, clean energy, financial services, life sciences, information technology, transportation, semiconductors, or a corporate headquarters facility. Annual credit, provided for up to 20 years, against the corporate income or premium tax liability. Businesses must make a cumulative investment of at least \$25 million and create a minimum of 100 new full-time jobs.
- Research and Development Tax Credit Program – provides a corporate income tax credit for qualified research expenses in Florida for eligible businesses in the targeted industries: manufacturing, life

sciences, information technology, aviation and aerospace, homeland security and defense, cloud information technology, marine sciences, materials science, and nanotechnology.

- Renewable Energy Technologies Investment Tax Credit – credit against the corporate income tax for 75 percent of all capital costs, operation and maintenance costs, and research and development costs in connection with an investment in the production, storage, and distribution of biodiesel, ethanol, and other renewable fuel in the state, including the costs of constructing, installing, and equipping such technologies in the state.
- Rural Job Tax Credit Program – tax credit for eligible businesses located within one of 36 designated Qualified Rural Areas to create new jobs.

## Tax Refunds

- Rural Areas of Opportunity Exempt Goods and Services Sales Tax Refund Program – offers a maximum sales tax refund of up to \$10,000 for the purchase of building materials, the rental of tangible personal property, and pest control services used in new construction projects within a Rural Area of Opportunity.

## Tax Exemptions

- Manufacturing Machinery and Equipment Sales Tax Exemption – available to those whose primary business activity at the location where the industrial machinery and equipment is used to manufacture, process, compound, or produce items of tangible personal property for sale is specified in North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) Codes 31, 32, 33, 112511, and 423930 (Manufacturing). Exempts parts and accessories only when purchased for the machinery and equipment before the date the machinery and equipment is placed into service.
- Research & Development Machinery and Equipment Sales Tax Exemption – available for purchases or lease of machinery and equipment used predominantly for research and development purposes.

Machinery and Equipment Used in Production of Electrical or Steam Energy Sales Tax Exemption – available to facilities that burn boiler fuels, other than residual oil. The electrical or steam energy must be primarily used for manufacturing, processing, compounding, or producing for sale, items of tangible personal property in Florida. If a facility burns both residual and non residual fuels, the exemption is prorated. If 15 percent or less of all electrical or steam energy produced is from using residual oil, the full exemption applies.

- Solar Energy Systems Equipment Sales Tax Exemption – for the equipment and requisite hardware that provide and are used for collecting, transferring, converting, storing or using incidental solar energy for water heating, space heating and cooling, or other applications that would otherwise require the use of a conventional source of energy such as petroleum products, natural gas, manufactured gas, or electricity.

## Loan Programs

- Rural Community Development Revolving Loan Fund – provides loans to local governments, or economic development organizations substantially underwritten by a unit of local government, to finance initiatives directed toward maintaining or developing the economic base of rural communities, especially

when addressing employment opportunities.

- Rebuild Florida Business Loan Fund – addresses the current gap in available, affordable capital for businesses by providing longer term loans with higher funding levels at market interest rates. Available to assist businesses statewide with economic development and resiliency.
- Local Government Revolving Emergency Bridge Loan – provides interest free loans to help local governments support government operations that may have been impacted by a federally declared disaster.
- State Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI) program – a Collateral Support Program that enables financing that might otherwise be unavailable due to a collateral shortfall. This credit enhancement uses public resources to encourage private lenders to lend money to businesses by providing a cash deposit as collateral for a business loan or credit facility and may be used to fund start-up costs, business procurement, franchise fees, equipment, inventory, and the purchase, construction, renovation, or tenant improvements of an eligible place of business.

## Miscellaneous

- Expedited Permitting Review Process – qualifying businesses can apply to be certified for an expedited review process for permitting and amendments to comprehensive plans. The process is to facilitate the location and expansion of economic development projects that offer job creation and high wages, strengthen, and diversify the state's economy, and have been thoughtfully planned to take into consideration the protection of the environment.
- Private Activity Bonds (incl. the Florida First Business Allocation) – Part VI of Chapter 159 provides for allocation of Florida's state volume limitation imposed on private activity bonds by the Internal Revenue Service. Among the allocations, the Florida First Business Allocation Pool was created, and reserves 20 percent of Florida's total annual private activity bond allocation for large industrial projects making significant contributions to Florida's economy.
- Single Sales Factor Apportionment – allows eligible corporations the ability to use the single sales factor apportionment to calculate Florida income for Florida income tax purposes. Qualifying businesses must make at least \$250 million in qualified capital expenditures in a two-year period.
- Florida Development Finance Corporation – designated as a state-wide, special development financing authority (bond agency) for economic development purposes. "Its purpose is to assist new and existing businesses and organizations (for-profit and not-for-profit) with access to capital through financings that promote business activity, job creation, and an improved standard of living for the citizens of Florida".
- Florida Seaport Transportation and Economic Development Program (FSTED) – a Department of Transportation program that finances seaport infrastructure projects, improves the efficiency of moving goods and people, and supports the interests and purposes of Florida's 16 public seaports.

## International Trade

- SelectFlorida Export Assistance – provides a variety of export assistance programs and trade grants, to

assist Florida firms seeking to export goods and services to international markets. Primarily directed to small-to-mid-sized businesses with emphasis on manufacturers, high tech companies and value-added service providers and focus on helping Florida exporters to enter new markets and identify new clients worldwide.

- SelectFlorida International Offices Program – international offices engage in recruiting foreign direct investment (FDI) in Florida and providing support to Florida exporters. Foreign offices are located strategically in key target markets worldwide. The foreign offices work closely with our Florida based FDI recruitment team to promote Florida as an ideal investment destination, identify foreign investment prospects, and assist them to establish in Florida.

## Workforce Development Programs funded by U.S. Department of Labor and various federally funded workforce training and job placement programs overseen and administered by FloridaCommerce, CareerSource Florida, and local workforce development boards, including, but not limited to:

- Disaster Recovery Dislocated Worker Grants – federal grants that provide disaster-relief employment, as well as employment and training services to eligible participants that minimize the impact of large, unexpected emergencies and natural disasters causing significant job losses.
- Federal Bonding Program – an incentive program that allows employers to hire with limited liability to their business at-risk job applicants by providing a business insurance policy that insures the employer for theft, forgery, larceny, or embezzlement by the bonded employee.
- Jobs for Veterans State Grant – prepares veterans, transitioning service members, and eligible spouses for meaningful careers. The program offers services to break down barriers to employment, delivered through the case management framework with an empathetic approach and a veteran’s perspective.
- Trade Adjustment Assistance Program – assists workers adversely affected by foreign trade and competition who have lost their jobs or are threatened to lose their jobs, due to a decline in production, sales, or outsourcing to foreign countries. The program offers extended income support, training, employment and case management services, and many other benefits to displaced workers who are certified as eligible.
- Wagner-Peyser – A federally funded labor exchange that matches employers with qualified job seekers and supports the State’s online labor exchange and case management system, Employ Florida.
- WIOA Adult – provides adults over the age of 18 with workforce activities such as training and career services that increase employment, retention, earnings, and occupational skill attainment which improves the quality of the workforce, reduces public assistance dependency, and enhances the productivity and competitiveness of the economy.
- WIOA Youth – delivers a comprehensive array of services that focus on assisting out-of-school youth

and in-school youth with one or more barriers to employment prepare for postsecondary education and employment opportunities, attain educational and/or skills training credentials, and secure employment with advancement opportunities.

- Work Opportunity Tax Credit Program – provides employers with the opportunity to earn a federal tax credit between \$1,200 and \$9,600 per employee when they hire a new employee who is a qualifying member of one of the defined target groups.
- Apprenticeship Programs – Registered apprenticeship programs enable employers to develop and apply industry standards to training programs for registered apprentices that can increase productivity and improve the quality of the workforce. Certifications earned through registered apprenticeships are recognized nationwide.
- Experiential Learning Tax Credit (Department of Revenue) – program that provides a corporate income/franchise tax credit for up to five apprentices, pre-apprentices, or student interns employed by businesses for taxable years beginning during calendar years 2022-2025. The maximum tax credit available to a qualified business is \$10,000 each year.
- Pathways to Career Opportunities Grant Program (Department of Education) – grant program to establish new, operate existing, or expand existing registered apprenticeship or pre-apprenticeship programs in high schools, school district career centers, charter technical career centers, Florida College System Institutions, and other entities authorized to sponsor apprenticeship or pre-apprenticeship programs.
- Non-Custodial Parent Employment Program – this state-funded program awards grants to organizations that assist noncustodial parents who are unemployed or underemployed and have difficulty meeting child support obligations to become self-sufficient and establish a successful pattern of paying child support obligations.
- Quick Response Training – state-funded grant program that provides funding for customized training to new or expanding businesses in Florida’s targeted industries.
- Incumbent Worker Training – grant funding for 12 month continuing education and training of incumbent employees at existing Florida businesses.
- Veterans Florida – helps military veterans transition to civilian life and to promote Florida’s status as the nation’s most veteran-friendly state. Includes a Florida Workforce Grant Program that reimburses qualified employers’ 50 percent of industry skills-based training costs for new or current veteran employees, a Career Services Program that connects veterans with employers who are eager to hire veterans for jobs, and a Florida Entrepreneurship Program that provides all the knowledge needed to successfully launch and operate a business.

## Community Development Grant Programs

- Rural Infrastructure Fund Program – facilitates the planning, preparing, and financing of infrastructure projects in rural communities, which will encourage job creation, capital investment, and the

strengthening and diversification of rural economies.

- Florida Small Cities Community Development Block Grant Program – provides funding to small urban and rural communities for housing and community development activities. This is a competitive grant program that awards funds to units of local government in small urban and rural areas in the areas of Neighborhood Revitalization, Housing Rehabilitation, Commercial Revitalization, and Economic Development.
- Community Partnership Technical Assistance Grant – The Community Partnership Technical Assistance (CPTA) grant program through FloridaCommerce, provides funding opportunities of up to \$75,000 to support local government initiatives like infrastructure planning, economic development strategies, and community revitalization efforts. For Taylor County, leveraging CPTA grants enabled the completion of the 2024 Adams & Reese Environmental and Economic Study and can assist in the creation of comprehensive development plans, technical assessments, and feasibility studies, essential for addressing growth challenges. This program facilitates collaboration with experts and stakeholders, empowering the county to implement impactful, data-driven solutions that promote sustainable economic and community development. The window for application usually opens in May.

## Federal Business Incentives and Programs

- Opportunity Zones (OZ) – Parts of Taylor County are designated as Opportunity Zones, allowing businesses and investors to benefit from substantial tax advantages on capital gains when investing in these areas. This program encourages development in economically disadvantaged regions and provides long-term tax benefits. The initial OZ round is set to expire after December 31, 2026, but there is an effort underway to create a second round of OZs, making improvements to specifically benefit rural communities and investment therein, scheduled to begin January 1, 2027, and end December 31, 2033.
- Small Business Administration (SBA) Programs – The SBA offers a variety of programs to support small businesses, including low-interest loans, technical assistance, and federal contracting opportunities. These resources are crucial for startups and small businesses looking to scale their operations.
- Federal Tax Credits – Companies may qualify for federal tax credits, including those for hiring veterans, investing in renewable energy projects, or conducting research and development. These credits can significantly reduce tax liability and enhance profitability.
- United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) – Competitive loans and grants are listed on the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) website.
- Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations Program – provides planning, design, and construction of measures that address resource concerns in a watershed. Eligible projects include Flood Prevention, Watershed Protection, Public Recreation, Public Fish and Wildlife, Agricultural Water Management, Municipal and Industrial Water Supply, or Water Quality Management.
- Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program - Offers technical and financial assistance to help local communities relieve imminent threats to life and property caused by floods, fires, windstorms and other natural disasters that impair a watershed. EWP does not require a disaster declaration by federal or

state government officials for program assistance to begin.

- Emergency Community Water Assistance Grant Program – this program helps eligible communities prepare, or recover from, an emergency that threatens the availability of safe, reliable drinking water.
- Water and Waste Disposal Loan & Grant Program - this program provides funding for clean and reliable drinking water systems, sanitary sewage disposal, sanitary solid waste disposal, and storm water drainage to households and businesses in eligible rural areas.
- Rural Community Development Initiative (RCDI) - RCDI grants are awarded to help non-profit housing and community development organizations, low-income rural communities and federally recognized tribes support housing, community facilities and community and economic development projects in rural areas.
- Economic Development Administration (EDA) – The EDA has open, unlimited, revolving competitive funds that can be applied for at any time and with technical assistance. As a REDI community, Taylor County can avoid the state level matching requirement for grants and could potentially utilize state level grants as a portion of match to secure EDA funds. In addition, the EDA may also be able to cover up to 100% of the grant application for communities with less than 100,000 residents, like Taylor County. The EDA EAA Disaster Supplemental Grant Program is intended to be flexible and responsive to the economic development needs and priorities of local and regional stakeholders, including those seeking assistance recovering from Federally declared disasters.
- Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) – The Airport Improvement Program (AIP) airport grant program funds airport infrastructure projects such as runways, taxiways, airport signage, airport lighting, and airport markings. The grants strengthen our nation's aviation infrastructure.
- FAA's Airport Terminals Program Grants fund projects address aging airport infrastructure; bring airport facilities into conformity with current standards; construct, modify, or expand facilities as necessary to meet demonstrated aeronautical demand; enhancing environmental sustainability; encouraging actual and potential competition; and providing a balanced system of airports to support civil aeronautical demand.
- Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) – The Rural Health Care Services Outreach Program is a community-based grant program that aims to support organizations to promote rural health care services outreach by improving and expanding the delivery of health care services to include new and enhanced services in rural areas. To achieve this purpose, the program also aims to strengthen local resources and capacity in rural communities. Through collaborative consortiums that include three or more health care providers, each community can develop innovative approaches to solve their own unique challenges and factors underlying rural health disparities.
- United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) – Emerging Contaminants in Small or Disadvantaged Communities Grant Program (ECSDC) provides states and territories with grants to public water systems in small or disadvantaged communities to address emerging contaminants, including PFAS.

- United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) – The Planning Assistance to States (PAS) Program offers two types of planning assistance: technical assistance and comprehensive plans. Assistance under PAS covers all USACE mission areas to include flood risk management, ecosystem restoration, and navigation, as well as water supply and water resilience. Eligible partners under PAS include any state, or group of states, federally recognized Native American Tribe (Tribal Nation), U.S. Territories, or other non-federal entities to include non-profit organizations with the support of the affected local government.
- United States Fish and Wildlife Service – The Fish and Wildlife Coastal Grant Program is a community-based program that helps coastal areas with technical and financial support to address complex conservation challenges of priority coastal ecosystems. This support is mainly provided through cooperative agreements with conservation partners and landowners, including state and Tribal agencies. The goal is to restore and protect fish and wildlife habitats on both public and private lands. Coastal Program staff work with partners, stakeholders, and other Service programs in important areas for conservation.
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) – The NFWF Southeast Aquatics Program seeks proposals to conserve aquatic habitat in the southeastern United States. Funds from this program will support projects that improve water quality, water quantity, instream condition, and riparian condition. In only some geographies, funding is also available to support aquatic connectivity, species recovery, monitoring, and planning.
- United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) – The Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) Grant Program improves roadway safety by significantly reducing or eliminating roadway fatalities and serious injuries through the development of Action Plans and refinement and implementation focused on all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, public transportation users, motorists and commercial vehicle operators.
- Federal Highway Administration Bridge Investment Program – The Bridge Investment Program is a competitive, discretionary program that focuses on existing bridges to reduce the overall number of bridges in poor condition, or in fair condition at risk of falling into poor condition. It also expands applicant eligibilities to create opportunities for all levels of government to be direct recipients of program funds. Alongside states and federal lands management agencies, metropolitan planning organizations and local and tribal governments can also apply directly to FHWA, making it easier to advance projects at the local level that meet community needs.
- Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-saving Transportation (PROTECT) Grant Program - This program provides funding to ensure surface transportation resilience to natural hazards including climate change, sea level rise, flooding, extreme weather events, and other natural disasters through support of planning activities, resilience improvements, community resilience and evacuation routes, and at-risk coastal infrastructure.
- Federal Railroad Administration Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Grant Program - The purpose of the CRISI Program is to invest in a wide range of projects within the United States to improve railroad safety, efficiency, and reliability; mitigate congestion at both intercity passenger rail and freight rail chokepoints to support more efficient travel and goods movement;

enhance multi-modal connections; and lead to new or substantially improved Intercity Passenger Rail Transportation corridors.

- Federal Railroad Administration Railroad Crossing Elimination (RCE) Grant Program - The purpose of the RCE Program is to fund highway-rail or pathway-rail grade crossing improvement projects that focus on improving the safety and mobility of people and goods.
- Nationally Significant Multimodal Freight & Highway Projects (INFRA) Program - INFRA awards competitive grants for multimodal freight and highway projects of national or regional significance to improve the safety, efficiency, and reliability of the movement of freight and people in and across rural and urban areas. The INFRA grant program funding will be made available under the Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant (MPDG) combined Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO).

## Recommendations for New or Expanded Incentive Programs

The economic development arena is very aggressive in the Southeast United States, and Taylor County should consider expanding its existing incentive programs and introducing new initiatives that align with its economic development goals. Recommendations include customized incentive packages enhancing business retention (i.e. economic gardening) and microloan programs providing small amounts of capital with low interest rates and flexible terms for startups or businesses that may not qualify for traditional loans. Foreign Trade Zone (FTZ) activation at strategic industrial sites should also be considered given the uncertainty surrounding tariffs moving forward and Tallahassee International Airport's efforts in pursuing FTZ status may serve the County well as the potential Grantee.

# Goals for Economic Growth

- Gather as much information as possible from Chet Thompson to have a good understanding of the condition of the GP Mill post-demolition and environmental remediation to position it to the marketplace accordingly.
- Backfill West Fraser site for immediate job creation, then prioritize focus on development of the City of Perry Site, Gram's Legacy site, and GP site while environmental remediation is nearing completion.
- Establish a satellite SBDC office in Taylor County as soon as possible.
- Identify new Gulf access point(s) to enhance and strengthen Taylor County's waterfront economy.
- Increase Business Retention efforts by implementing aggressive programs to support existing businesses, helping them overcome barriers to growth and providing tools to expand within the County.
- Conduct detailed assessments and prioritize current and future infrastructure needs throughout the County to identify key projects to secure funding for improvements to support existing businesses and attract new.
- Launch a coordinated marketing strategy to aggressively reposition Taylor County as THE greatest opportunity in the state of Florida, promoting its business opportunities, advantages, and quality of life to potential investors and companies. Attending at least one major conference or prospect meeting a quarter to engage with site selectors and or direct business prospects is suggested.
- Add at least two new sites/opportunities annually to Taylor County's site selection inventory.
- Develop initiatives in partnership with private sector businesses, local schools, colleges, vocational and career and technical education programs to prepare residents for new opportunities in growing industries, while at the same time elevating the rating of the school district. Launching a pilot with the Savvas Outlier program would be an immediate recommendation in this effort.
- Strengthen collaboration between local governments, community organizations, and the private sector to ensure a unified approach to economic development and efficient use of resources.
- Target high-value and high-multiplier industry in the advanced manufacturing sector to diversify the local economy and create high-quality job opportunities for residents.
- Promote environmentally responsible development practices that balance economic growth with the preservation of the county's natural resources and rural character.
- Launch an innovation hub/shared workspace in Perry, fostering the entrepreneurial spirit in the community while allowing for shared resources.

# Regular Review & Update Process for the Strategic Plan

- Business Retention: number of existing businesses receiving support from the TCDA and associated community partners and continuing operations in Taylor County.
- Job Creation: new jobs created through business retention and attraction efforts.
- Capital Investment: total amount of private investment in Taylor County.
- Site Development: number of sites made available for business relocation and expansion.
- Population Growth: increase in population, especially those related to job creation.
- Housing Development: number of new housing units built to accommodate growth.

To ensure the strategic plan adapts to changing circumstances, the plan will be reviewed and updated regularly, and quarterly progress reports as well as an annual report will be delivered to the Taylor County Board of County Commissioners by the TCDA.

# Conclusion

Taylor County has been through so much over recent years, but the community's heart and resiliency will ultimately prevail. Being laser-focused on areas of immediate improvement will ultimately kickstart the economy and allow for more growth to occur. There will never be a time where virtually all hands are on deck and willing to support the County quite like now so the time to act is now.

The best is yet to come, and that is not a wish – it is a promise.