Hernando County

Board of County Commissioners

Hernando County Utilities Department
15365 Cortez Boulevard, Brooksville, FL 34613

Strategic Plan Meeting

Agenda

Wednesday, June 18, 2025 - 9:30 A.M.

IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT, PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES NEEDING A SPECIAL ACCOMMODATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROCEEDING SHOULD CONTACT JAN HOUSER, HERNANDO COUNTY HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT, 15470 FLIGHT PATH DRIVE, BROOKSVILLE, FLORIDA 34604, (352) 754-4013. IF HEARING IMPAIRED, PLEASE CALL 1-800-676-3777.

If a person decides to appeal any quasi-judicial decision made by the Hernando County Board of County Commissioners with respect to any matter considered at such hearing or meeting, he or she will need a record of the proceeding, and that, for such purpose, he or she may need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceeding is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based.

PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS MEETING HAS A START TIME OF 9:30 A.M., AND ALL ITEMS CAN BE HEARD ANYTIME THEREAFTER.

UPCOMING MEETINGS:

The Board of County Commissioners' next regular meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, June 24, 2024, beginning at 9:00 A.M., in the John Law Ayers County Commission Chambers, Room 160.

The Board of County Commissioners' is scheduled to hold a budget workshop for Tuesday, June 24, 2025, beginning at 1:00 P.M., or soon thereafter, in the John Law Ayers Commission Chambers, Room 160.

The Board of County Commissioners' has scheduled a land use meeting to consider land use petitions on Tuesday, July 1, 2025, beginning at 9:00 A.M., in the John Law Ayers Commission Chambers, Room 160.

A.   CALL TO ORDER

1.   Invocation

2.   Pledge of Allegiance

B.   APPROVAL OF AGENDA (Limited to Board and Staff)

C.   COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR JEFFREY ROGERS

     16006   Hernando County Commissioner Forum I: Phase I Data Discussion & Drafting Strategic Plan

D.   CITIZENS' COMMENTS

E.   ADJOURNMENT

Board of County Commissioners

Meeting: 06/18/2025
Department: Administration
Prepared By: Carla Rossiter-Smith
Initiator: Carla Rossiter-Smith
DOC ID: 16006
Legal Request Number:
Bid/Contract Number:

AGENDA ITEM

TITLE
Hernando County Commissioner Forum I: Phase I Data Discussion & Drafting Strategic Plan

BRIEF OVERVIEW
This meeting is the beginning of Phase II of the County's Strategic Planning Process. The process began with Phase I in October of 2024 and concluded in June of 2025. Commissioner Forum I topics will include:

- Debrief of Phase I data and activities including findings from:
    - citizen & employee surveys
    - citizen & employee forums
- Review of initial citizen and employee desires for the future of the County, including potential goals, objectives and recommendations related to the vision
- Developing mission, vision, values, and strategic SMART goals for the County government as an organization.

FINANCIAL IMPACT
NA

LEGAL NOTE
The Board has authority to act on this matter pursuant to Chapter 125, Florida Statutes.

RECOMMENDATION
It is recommended that the Board have discussion regarding a Strategic Plan for Hernando County.

REVIEW PROCESS
Pamela Hare	Approved	06/06/2025	4:58 PM
Heidi Prouse	Approved	06/06/2025	5:04 PM
Toni Brady	Approved	06/09/2025	2:32 PM
Jeffrey Rogers	Approved	06/09/2025	3:23 PM
Colleen Conko	Approved	06/09/2025	3:26 PM

Hernando County
Leadership Forum 1

Wednesday, June 18, 2025

Welcome: Review of Phase I Executive Summary
Data Collected To Date

Angela Crist

The John Scott Dailey
Florida Institute of Government at University of South Florida

John Daly, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, School of Public Affairs,
University of South Florida

Stephen Neely, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, School of Public Affairs,
University of South Florida

Agenda

Phase I Executive Summary/Reference Materials ✓

Our Vision

Our Mission & Core Values

Our Goals

Wrap-Up & Next Steps for Phase II Meetings

Refining our Strategic Journey

2030 Vision Statement & SMART+C Goals

Objectives

1-Year Action Plan

Mission & Values

Drafting our Vision

Vision: An overarching, aspirational description of what we want to achieve in the future

Great Examples: Vision

An overarching, aspirational description of what we want to achieve in the future

To preserve our past and embrace our future by ensuring healthy, safe and affordable living and learning opportunities in a diverse and thriving economy.

Gwinnett is the preferred community where everyone thrives!

We cherish our heritage, embrace opportunity, and offer an extraordinary community in which to spend a lifetime.

Also Reference Phase I Executive Summary

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Drafting our Mission

***Mission**: A statement that explains, in simple and concise terms, an organization's purpose and reason for existence.*

Great Examples: Mission

A statement that explains, in simple and concise terms, an organization's purpose and reason for existence.

To provide and support exemplary public service and expand economic opportunities.

Gwinnett proudly supports our vibrantly connected community by delivering superior services.

The mission of Dinwiddie County Government is to build our community through commitment to excellence in public service.

Also Reference Phase I Executive Summary

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Drafting our Values

A set of standards that establishes a framework for expected behavior and decision-making. These values are non-negotiable and even when the nature of goals, work or leadership established might change over time, these principles apply as an unwavering guide in all circumstances.

Great Examples: Values

A set of standards that establishes a framework for expected behavior and decision-making. These values are non-negotiable and even when the nature of goals, work or leadership established might change over time, these principles apply as an unwavering guide in all circumstances.

Respect, Honesty, Transparency, Communication, Diversity, Advancement, Health

Integrity: We believe in being honest, building trust, and having strong moral principles.
Accountability: We believe in stewardship, transparency, and sustainability.
Equity: We believe in fairness and respect for all.
Inclusivity: We believe in engaging, embracing, and unifying our communities.
Innovation: We believe in continual adaptation of technology, process, and experience.

S.T.R.I.V.E

Stewardship: The job of supervising or taking care of something.
Teamwork: Individuals sharing ideas and knowledge and uniting to work toward one mission and vision.
Respect: Regard for the feelings, wishes, rights,or traditions of others.
Integrity: Consistently providing responsible, ethical service on personal and professional levels.
Value-Added Customer Service: The practice of providing solution to problems and questions, not just responses.
Excellence: The quality of being outstanding or extremely good.

Also Reference Phase I Executive Summary

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Drafting our Goals

Goal: A broad statement of a desired future condition

Great Examples: Goals

A broad statement of a desired future condition

Goal 1: Public Safety Preparedness
Ensure that citizens' safety and health are maximized by having a highly qualified and trained public safety team that is prepared with the appropriate resources to provide an exceptional standard of care.

- G1A: Provide equipment, technology and vehicles to meet response goals.
- G1B: Ensure employees receive and maintain training for required certifications.
- G1C: Plan for resilient responses through disaster preparedness and resource identification.

Goal 2: Growing Economic Strength
Diversify the County's economic strength by attracting new industries, supporting existing industries and focusing on infrastructure development.

- G2A: Expand industry, employers and amenities in Triangle North Franklin Business Park.
- G2B: Maintain support for agricultural heritage and objectives through citizen education around agricultural contributions and agritourism opportunities.
- G2C: Address growth demands by reviewing Ordinances, ensuring compliance with policies and partnering with municipalities to achieve consistency.
- G2D: Pursue and allocate resources that fund and expand internet offerings to citizens.
- G2E: Continue the implementation of the Water Supply Study by identifying long-term and short-term water resources.
- G2F: Pursue financial support for Triangle North Executive Airport's continued expansion.

Goal 3: Fiscally Strong and Engaged Government
Maintain the County's strong financial position and fiscal management policies and procedures.

- G3A: Adopt an annual budget that reflects and supports the Mission, Vision and Goals of the County.
- G3B: Adhere to up-to-date and sound financial practices including audits, fiscal policies and annual review of the tax rate.
- G3C: Adopt an annual Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) that addresses growth and responds to citizen needs.
- G3D: Maintain employee compensation levels that attract and retain a qualified and dedicated workforce.
- G3E: Ensure that processes and efficiency solutions are customer focused.

Also Reference Phase I Executive Summary

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What **One Word** Describes Today?
(skip registration)

NEXT STEPS: ACTION ITEMS & TIMELINE

Phase Two

2.1	Commissioner Forum I (6 hours) off-site	June 18, 2025
2.2	County Administrator & Executive Leadership Planning Meeting	July 11, 2025
2.3	Leadership Forum II (3 hours) off-site	July 31, 2025
2.4	County Administrator & Executive Leadership Planning Meeting	August 8, 2025
2.5	Final Report Internal Review	September 23, 2025
2.6	Final Report to Commission Workshop	October 2025

Phase Three:

3.1	Strategies for supporting the implementation plan	November 2025
3.2	Implementation plan facilitation	November 2026

Thank You!

Hernando County
Stakeholder Interview Summary Report

April 2025

Prepared for:
Hernando County

Prepared by:
Florida Institute of Government
University of South Florida

Background

Hernando County has engaged the University of South Florida (USF) Florida Institute of Government (FIOG) to complete a comprehensive Strategic Planning Process for the County. As part of this process, USF FIOG conducted 18 interviews with key stakeholders provided to the USF FIOG by County Staff. The FIOG advised the County to include key individuals, businesses, and organization stakeholders that would have insights into issues facing the County or into the views and opinions of segments of the members of the Community. Interviews were conducted between January-March 2025 by Angela Crist, USF FIOG Director. Interviews were one-on-one, virtual, and lasted approximately 45 minutes. Below is a summary of the interviews grouped by question.

List of questions participants were asked:

1) What are the county's greatest strengths or assets for future success? Please list the five (5) most important county strengths for success:

2) What three words describe the county to you?

3) What are the major liabilities (weaknesses) that limit future growth and success for the county? Please list the five (5) most significant county liabilities:

4) What are the major opportunities facing the county that can have a major impact on future success? Please list five (5) opportunities (5 years out) for Hernando County:

5) Do you believe that 5 years into the future that there could be any major threats that could prevent the county from flourishing? If so, please list five (5) threats (5 years out) for future sustainability

6) What do you see as the primary issue(s) facing the county? Why? How would you resolve it?

7) What outcomes would you like to see from the strategic planning process?

8) Other comments

WHAT ARE THE COUNTY'S GREATEST STRENGTHS OR ASSETS FOR FUTURE SUCCESS? PLEASE LIST THE FIVE (5) MOST IMPORTANT COUNTY STRENGTHS FOR SUCCESS:

Summary:

The strengths below highlight the county's potential for growth and development, leveraging its natural beauty, strategic location, strong community, and effective leadership. Key strengths (themes) identified include community and leadership, natural environment, location and accessibility, economic opportunities, affordable living, and education/workforce development. The topics below are listed in order of how frequently they came up during interviews.

Affordable Living
- *Affordable Living:* Reasonable cost of living and availability of real estate.

Community and Leadership
- *Small Town Feel:* The county retains a hometown feel with a sense of safety and community.
- *Leadership:* Effective leadership and application of tax dollars to improve government areas.
- *Community Engagement:* Engaged community leaders and a vocal, kind, and loving community.

Economic Opportunities
- *Tourism:* Tourism is a strong sector, with the county being safe from bad weather.
- *Business Development:* Opportunities for businesses to partner and work together.

Education and Workforce Development
- *New College:* Helps retain people within the county.
- *Job Creation:* Industrial Park and manufacturing opportunities provide jobs that do not require a college degree.

Location and Accessibility
- *Proximity to Urban Areas:* Close to Orlando and Tampa, making it easier to attract new hires and businesses.
- *Access to the Gulf:* Coastal areas like Hernando Beach and natural springs are significant assets.
- *Transportation:* Good road network and airport facilities.

Natural Environment
- *Nature Coast:* Offers a lot with its natural beauty and biodiversity.
- *Springs and Rivers:* Need protection and are valued by the community.
- *Agricultural Land:* Large amounts of conservation and agricultural land support biodiversity.

WHAT THREE WORDS DESCRIBE THE COUNTY TO YOU?

Summary:

When asked what three words best describe the county to you during the interview, the following responses were given. The descriptive words are listed by topic

Growth and Development
growing, growth, fast growing, overdeveloped, unfettered development, enhancements, transition, opportunity, visionary

Community and Lifestyle
community, community-focused, community-based, family, Mayberry, friendly, peaceful, suburban, bedroom

Safety and Security
safe, resilient, strong, dependable, consistent

Environment and Nature
natural environment, nature, springs, biologically diverse, coastal, scenic, rural

Governance and Leadership
Fair, determined, logical, organized, unified, conservative, resistant, pragmatic, hopeful, optimistic

Challenges and Issues
Behind, challenged, comfortable

Affordability and Economy
Affordable, network, centralized, fresh

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WHAT ARE THE MAJOR LIABILITIES (WEAKNESSES) THAT LIMIT FUTURE GROWTH AND SUCCESS FOR THE COUNTY? PLEASE LIST THE FIVE (5) MOST SIGNIFICANT COUNTY LIABILITIES:

Summary:

These topics reflect the major opportunities and challenges facing Hernando County. The topics below are listed in order of how frequently they came up during interviews. Key topics and themes identified as liabilities for the future were infrastructure, housing, mental health services, environmental concerns, economic development, financial sustainability and community engagement, as well as growth management.

Community Engagement and Leadership
- Need for long-term sustainability in leadership
- Better collaboration between school district and county
- Community involvement in growth decisions

Environmental Concerns
- Protecting springs and waterways
- Nutrient loading in the basin
- Lack of funds for environmentally sensitive lands

Housing, Homelessness, and Mental Health Services
- Not enough affordable housing
- High costs of housing which is leading to homelessness
- Need for workforce housing
- Developers facing setbacks due to infrastructure issues
- Lack of mental health services for children
- General lack of mental health services

Infrastructure, Growth Management and Economic Development
- Growing pains with new housing developments
- Roads falling behind
- Need for new schools to support new developments
- Electrical inspections causing safety issues
- Water quality and pollution concerns
- Lack of enforcement on county ordinances
- Diversification of the economy
- Limited recreational options
- Need for strategic investment in infrastructure
- Need for higher paying jobs
- Limited support for economic development
- Need for a better mix of developments (commercial, industrial, agricultural)
- Unbridled growth without considering community impact
- Need to limit growth to preserve quality of life

Taxation, Revenue, and Investments
- Need to raise revenue without impacting fixed-income residents
- Concerns about tax base and affordability

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- Political obstruction in investing money for progress

Transportation
- East/west roads behind in design, permitting, and construction
- Need for better transportation infrastructure

WHAT ARE THE MAJOR OPPORTUNITIES FACING THE COUNTY THAT CAN HAVE A MAJOR IMPACT ON FUTURE SUCCESS? PLEASE LIST FIVE (5) OPPORTUNITIES (5 YEARS OUT) FOR HERNANDO COUNTY:

Summary:

The survey responses highlight several key opportunities for Hernando County's future success. Infrastructure development is a major focus, with mentions of airport growth, road expansion, and storm hardening projects. Economic development is also emphasized, including promoting industrial properties, incentivizing infill development, and attracting high-paying jobs. Housing and community services are crucial, with a need for affordable housing and wrap-around services. Environmental conservation efforts are important, such as preserving nature and enforcing protection zones. Additionally, improving education and schools, expanding healthcare services, and enhancing transportation infrastructure are vital for the county's growth. Community engagement, disaster management, and recreational opportunities are also noted as significant areas for development.

These topics reflect the major opportunities and challenges facing Hernando County, as identified by the interview respondents. The topics below are listed in order of how frequently they came up during interviews.

Key topics and themes identified as opportunities for the future were:

Community Engagement, Leadership, Education and Schools
- Improving school capacity
- Collaborating between the school district and county
- Investing in education and workforce solutions
- Long-term sustainability in leadership
- Community involvement in growth decisions
- Better collaboration between county departments

Environmental Conservation, Disaster and Emergency Management
- Preserving nature and parks
- Enforcing springs protection zones
- Conserving environmentally sensitive lands
- Implementing fertilizer bans
- Investing in emergency management tools and resources
- Developing disaster mitigation strategies

Housing, Community Services, and Healthcare Services
- Addressing affordable housing
- Providing income-based housing
- Investing in housing policies and funding

- Developing wrap-around services
- Expanding healthcare facilities
- Attracting healthcare workers
- Partnering for better healthcare services

Infrastructure Development and Economic Development
- Growth at the airport
- Expansion of roads and highways
- Strategic planning for new roadways
- Storm hardening projects
- Investing in utilities and infrastructure
- Promoting industrial properties
- Incentivizing infill development
- Creating business incubators
- Expanding industrial land
- Attracting high-paying jobs

Recreational Opportunities
- Developing parks and recreational facilities
- Promoting sports tourism

Transportation
- Improving east/west roadways
- Enhancing transportation infrastructure

DO YOU BELIEVE THAT 5 YEARS INTO THE FUTURE THAT THERE COULD BE ANY MAJOR THREATS THAT COULD PREVENT THE COUNTY FROM FLOURISHING? IF SO PLEASE LIST FIVE (5) THREATS (5 YEARS OUT) FOR FUTURE SUSTAINABILITY

Summary:

People were asked about the threats that could prevent Hernando County from flourishing in the next five years. The topics below are listed in order of how frequently they came up during interviews. Natural disasters such as hurricanes, sea level rise, and increased flooding are significant concerns as well as political and legislative issues including changes in governance and executive orders impacting residents. Economic concerns like property insurance, taxes, and economic downturns in the housing market are highlighted. Additionally, infrastructure and development challenges, such as overpopulation growth and unplanned development, stress the county's resources. Other threats that were noted were environmental problems, including threats to wildlife and natural habitats, and pollution. Social issues, including drugs and crime rates, and education challenges like overcrowding at schools, were also noted. Lastly, technological threats such as cybersecurity incidents were identified as potential risks.

Community, Social Issues, Education and Schools
- Drugs and crime rates
- Culture shock for new residents
- Lack of resources for rehab and mental illness

- Overcrowding at schools
- Lack of adequate services reaching all citizens

Natural Disasters and Environmental Threats
- Hurricanes
- Sea level rise
- Increased flooding
- Climate change impacts
- Threats to wildlife and natural habitats
- Pollution and nutrient loading
- Development impacting conservation lands

Political and Legislative Issues
- Political environment and climate
- Legislative changes affecting local governance
- Executive orders impacting residents

Technological Threats
- Cybersecurity incidents
- IT infrastructure vulnerabilities

WHAT OUTCOMES WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE FROM THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS?

Summary: These findings highlight the community's desire for **balanced growth, environmental preservation, efficient governance,** and **collaborative and transparent approach** to governance with residents. The topics below are listed in order of how frequently they came up during interviews. A few specific areas of focus were specifically mentioned, including developing Hernando Beach and relocating the fairgrounds.

Community Engagement and Education:
- Enhance public involvement and ensure elected officials are responsive to community goals.
- Educate the community on the balance between low taxes and investment.
- Address housing needs, zoning incentives, and mixed-income neighborhoods.

Economic Growth and Business Development:
- Encourage business growth and support new businesses.
- Improve infrastructure to attract diverse businesses, not just restaurants and stores.
- Raise impact fees to fund infrastructure and parks.

Environmental and Community Preservation:
- Maintain the natural environment and rustic nature of the community.
- Implement sustainable growth practices and protect environmentally sensitive lands.
- Control the pace of development and work with water management authorities.

Funding and Economic Development:
- Define funding plans for initiatives and prioritize economic development.
- Improve the tax base and dedicate revenue streams for economic development.
- Develop a better-educated workforce and retirees.

Government Efficiency and Transparency:
- Improve the efficiency of regulatory processes and hiring practices.
- Ensure proactive addressing of issues and commitment to continuous improvement.
- Increase outreach to residents and use their feedback in decision-making.
- Transparent and actionable deliverables with consensus among elected officials.

Long-term Planning and Resilience:
- Develop a three-year plan with specific goals, objectives, and metrics.
- Align strategic plans with quality of life, low taxes, and budget considerations.
- Comply with building codes and FEMA requirements for flood insurance.

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE PRIMARY ISSUE(S) FACING THE COUNTY? WHY? HOW WOULD YOU RESOLVE IT?

Summary:

These responses highlight a strong desire for strategic planning, infrastructure improvement, environmental protection, and community engagement to address the county's issues effectively. Key areas issues identified include strategic planning, infrastructure, environmental protection, economic development, and community engagement. Issues and proposed resolutions are grouped by topic and listed below.

Attainable Housing and Housing Developments
Resolution: Improve wrap-around services such as hospitals, schools, infrastructure, transportation, parks, and recreation. Implement strategic planning before further development.

Resolution: Invest in educational opportunities and stipulate costs for new developments. Explore initiatives like Tampa HOPE with wrap-around services.

Economic Development
Resolution: Attract businesses that pay higher wages and invest in housing and economic development to balance the tax base.

Environmental Protection
Resolution: Restart the county's environmentally sensitive land program, adhere to the comprehensive plan, and implement restrictions on fertilizer use and lawn watering.

Government Efficiency
Resolution: Engage the public to ensure tax dollars are spent wisely and explore ways to improve efficiency.

Growth, Infrastructure, Overdevelopment, Population Growth, Infrastructure Investment
Resolution: Address infrastructure issues (schools, roadways, water, sewer, public safety) through taxes and impact fees. Control the rate of growth and invest in infrastructure.

Resolution: Change building and zoning regulations, increase impact fees, and fund environmental land purchases to protect natural resources.

Resolution: Develop a comprehensive plan to manage population growth over the next few years.

Resolution: Develop a plan to invest in growth while budgeting for increased costs. Consider revenue sources like impact fees and bonds.

Services for Children in Crisis
Resolution: Develop legislation to support appropriations requests and create private partnerships with local hospitals.

Transportation
Resolution: Create a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) for roads similar to the water and sewer district plan. Utilize bonds to fund road construction.

OTHER COMMENTS

Summary:

Participants were given the opportunity to provide any other comments they had. Comments were a mix of praise, constructive criticism, and suggestions for improvement across various aspects of county governance and community services. Comments below are sorted by topic/theme.

Strategic Planning:
Importance of implementing strategic plans rather than letting them sit unused.

County Staff:
High praise for the county staff's availability, follow-up, and dedication to serving the community.

Behavior at Meetings:
Need for more positive language and behavior at Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) meetings.

Environmental Cooperation:
Appreciation for the cooperative relationship with the Sierra Club and the desire to continue preserving the rural nature of the community.

Parks and Recreation:
Good facilities but underfunded and understaffed. Need better planning and maintenance.

Healthcare:
Addressing primary care and preventative medicine to reduce reliance on emergency rooms.

County Administration:
Recognition of the county administrator's efforts and the need for resident participation in governance.

Leadership and Unity:
Importance of unified leadership with residents' best interests in mind.

Safety and Governance:
Generally safe county with well-run officials, though some listen more than others.

Economic Development:
Impact of investments like TGH on the community and the need for government expansion to handle these investments.

Future Vision:
Aspiration for economic development and higher-paying jobs, not just residential growth.

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Elected Officials:
Expectation for vigorous debates but unified efforts for the county's health, including partnerships with the school district and Brooksville.

County Administrator:
Positive feedback for Jeff, the county administrator, and the need for investment in the future despite tough decisions on funding.

Decision-Making:
Commissioners should base decisions on science and expert opinions.

the John Scott Dailey

**FLORIDA
INSTITUTE OF
GOVERNMENT**
at the University of South Florida

We specialize in realizing and
implementing big ideas in
the public sector.

2025 Hernando Employee Survey

March 2025

Prepared for:
Hernando County

Prepared by:
Florida Institute of Government
University of South Florida

Table of Contents

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Introduction

Employee engagement is a vital factor in maintaining an effective and motivated workforce. Organizations that actively assess and respond to employee sentiment can cultivate a more productive, satisfied, and committed team. The 2025 Hernando County Employee Engagement Survey was conducted as part of the County's strategic planning process in order to provide county leaders with data-driven insights into the perspectives, concerns, and overall experiences of county employees.

This report presents a detailed analysis of employee feedback, identifying both strengths and areas for improvement across a variety of key workplace dimensions. Among other factors, the survey measured job satisfaction, workplace morale, compensation and benefits, leadership effectiveness, communication, and overall perceptions of the current organizational culture. Understanding these insights allows the county to make informed decisions that enhance employee experience and workplace satisfaction.

The findings presented in this report provide an in-depth assessment of the county's current engagement landscape, offering leadership a clear roadmap for strategic improvements. As part of the strategic planning process, the final section includes targeted recommendations designed to strengthen employee satisfaction, foster a positive work culture, and ensure Hernando County remains a desirable employer in the region.

Data and Methods

The 2025 Hernando County Employee Engagement Survey was distributed to 861 employees, yielding 180 responses (20.9% response rate). The survey was conducted electronically and remained open for several weeks to allow for broad participation across various county departments. Employees were encouraged to provide candid feedback, with assurances that all responses would remain anonymous to promote honest and constructive participation.

The survey instrument was designed to capture employee sentiment across multiple engagement factors, including job satisfaction, organizational culture, compensation and benefits, supervisory relationships, and leadership effectiveness. The questionnaire included both quantitative Likert-scale questions and open-ended responses to ensure a comprehensive understanding of employee perceptions. This mixed-method approach allows for both statistical analysis and

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qualitative insights into workplace dynamics. Analysis of the data was conducted using traditional statistical reporting techniques and was augmented with the use of a generative AI platform (Chat GPT 4.0, *OpenAI*) to assist in tasks such as content analysis of open-ended survey comments.

Survey Respondent Characteristics

To determine how balanced the survey's representation of the workforce was, demographic data were collected, including length of employment, supervisory status, and age (Table 1). Employees from all experience levels participated in the survey. The largest proportion of respondents, 30.4%, had been with Hernando County for two years or less, while 19.6% reported tenure between eleven and twenty years. This broad distribution ensures that the findings reflect perspectives from both newer hires and long-standing employees. Employees in supervisory roles were well represented, with 34.2% of respondents reporting at least some managerial responsibilities, while 65.8% reported none.

Table 1.

Respondent Characteristics

	Frequency	Percentage of Total Respondents
How long have you been employed by Hernando County?		
Two Years or Less	48	30.4
Three to Five Years	29	18.3
Six to Ten Years	25	15.8
Eleven to Twenty Years	31	19.6
More than Twenty Years	25	15.8
Does your current position include Supervisory responsibilities?		
Yes	54	34.2
No	104	65.8
Age		
18-24	6	3.8
25-34	22	14.0
35-44	23	14.6
45-54	50	31.8
55-64	53	33.8
65+	3	1.9

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The age distribution of respondents was also diverse. Employees aged 45-54 and 55-64 constituted the largest segments of participants, comprising 31.8% and 33.8% of responses, respectively. The smallest representation came from employees aged 18-24, who accounted for only 3.8% of the sample, which is not uncommon in public sector workplaces. These demographic trends provide useful context when interpreting the data, particularly concerning workplace priorities and engagement strategies.

Key Themes and Takeaways

A detailed summary of the survey responses is provided below, but several key findings emerged from the results. These are outlined below:

✓ **Employee Morale is Relatively High, but the Data Show Some Opportunities for Improvement:** While most employees enjoy their jobs, some concerns emerged with regard to work-life balance and workplace culture.
   o 94.4% of employees reported liking their job, but only 43.3% look forward to going to work most days.
   o 19.4% strongly agreed that overall morale among employees is high, while 39.5% disagreed, including 18.9% who strongly disagreed.
   o 86.6% of employees reported having a good work-life balance, but 13.4% expressed dissatisfaction, citing workload and stress.
   o Nearly half of employees (45.5%) rated Hernando County as a "Fair" place to work, with only 27.5% rating it as Excellent.

✓ **Employees Understand Their Roles but Seek Greater Alignment with Organizational Values:** Employees have a clear understanding of job expectations, but some feel disconnected from the county's overall mission and values.
   o 95.5% of employees agreed that they know what is expected of them in their roles.
   o 97.2% understand how their job contributes to the organization's mission, suggesting strong role clarity.
   o However, only 48.9% "strongly" agreed that their personal values align with those of the county.

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- ✓ **Compensation and Career Growth Opportunities Are Major Concerns:** Many employees feel undercompensated and believe career advancement opportunities within the county are limited.
    - o 39.5% of employees disagreed that they are fairly compensated, including 18.9% who strongly disagreed.
    - o Only 35.7% strongly agreed that they see opportunities for promotion within the county, while 16.2% disagreed.
    - o 28% of open-ended responses cited pay and compensation concerns, including lower wages than neighboring counties.
    - o 7% of responses specifically mentioned lack of career growth and advancement as a frustration.

- ✓ **Communication and Transparency Emerged as Opportunities for Improvement:** While employees have strong relationships with their direct supervisors, communication and transparency at higher leadership levels were sometimes cited as areas of concern.
    - o 82.7% of employees agreed that they receive regular feedback from their supervisor, and 90.6% feel treated fairly by their supervisor.
    - o However, only 62.2% believe that senior leaders listen to employee opinions, and 37.2% disagreed, including 14.4% who strongly disagreed.
    - o Only 58.4% agreed that different departments communicate effectively with one another, while 41.7% disagreed.
    - o 31.3% of employees disagreed that county leaders act transparently, highlighting an opportunity for improved openness in decision-making.

- ✓ **Employees Value Public Service but Cite Retention, Growth Management, and Workplace Challenges:** Hernando County employees are committed to public service but feel that retention challenges, growth management, and workplace policies could improve.
    - o 29% of open-ended responses cited community service and public engagement as a core strength of the county.
    - o 33% of responses listed pay and benefits as a weakness, with 22% mentioning retention and turnover issues.

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o 20% of employees stated that the county does not uphold the values it claims to prioritize, particularly in areas like fairness and transparency.

o Overdevelopment (20%) and bureaucratic inefficiencies (17%) were cited as concerns, with employees noting that growth is outpacing infrastructure and staffing capacity.

Survey Results

The subsections below provide a summary of the survey findings across the major themes and topics covered in the questionnaire, including (1) Employee Morale, (2) Organizational Mission and Values, (3) Equity and Inclusivity, (4) Compensation and Professional Development Opportunities, (5) Organizational Communications, (6) Departmental Culture, (7) Supervisory Relationships, (8) Organizational Leadership, and (9) Strategic Planning.

Employee Morale

The survey asked employees about their general satisfaction with their jobs, work-life balance, and overall morale within the organization (Table 2). In total, 94.4% of employees reported liking their job, with 64.4% strongly agreeing and 30.0% somewhat agreeing. When asked about their work-life balance, 86.6% agreed that they have a good work-life balance, while 10.6% disagreed, and 2.8% strongly disagreed.

Table 2.

Employee Quality of Life (reported as percentage of respondents by row)

Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements about working for Hernando County…	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I like my job with the County	64.4	30.0	4.4	1.1
I have a good work-life balance in my current role	47.2	39.4	10.6	2.8
I look forward to going to work most days	43.3	41.1	10.6	5.0
Overall morale among employees is high	19.4	41.1	20.6	18.9
Working for the County contributes positively to my overall quality of life	38.3	41.7	12.2	7.8

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Responses on workplace morale were more mixed. While 43.3% of employees agreed that they look forward to going to work most days, a notable 15.6% disagreed, with 5.0% strongly disagreeing. Perceptions of overall organizational morale were lower, with only 19.4% strongly agreeing that morale among employees is high. 41.1% somewhat agreed, while 39.5% disagreed, including 18.9% who strongly disagreed. Employees were also asked whether working for the county contributes positively to their overall quality of life, with 80.0% agreeing, while 12.2% disagreed and 7.8% strongly disagreed.

Along with these specifics, employees were asked to rate Hernando County as a place to work in general, with four response options: "Excellent," "Good," "Fair," and "Poor." Notably, only 27.5% rated the county as an excellent place to work, while 19.7% rated it as good (Table 3). The most common response, however, was "Fair" at 45.5%, indicating that nearly half of employees see room for improvement. 7.3% of respondents rated the county as a poor place to work, representing a small but notable segment of significant dissatisfaction.

Table 3.

Hernando County as a Place to Work

Overall, how would you describe Hernando County as a place to work?	Frequency	Percent
Excellent	49	27.5
Good	35	19.7
Fair	81	45.5
Poor	13	7.3

These findings suggest that while a portion of the workforce views the county as a strong employer, the majority believe it falls somewhere in the middle. The relatively high percentage of "Fair" ratings suggests that employees do not necessarily have strong negative opinions but do see areas where working conditions, policies, or culture could be improved.

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Organizational Mission and Values

To better understand public service motivation and value congruence among county employees, the survey asked respondents about their alignment with the county's mission and values, as well as their understanding of their job expectations. The responses were largely positive. For example, 95.5% of employees agreed that they know what is expected of them in their role, with 71.1% strongly agreeing and 24.4% somewhat agreeing. Similarly, 97.2% agreed that they understand how their job contributes to the larger mission of the organization, with only 2.8% disagreeing.

Table 4.

Organizational Mission and Values (reported as percentage of respondents by row)

Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements about working for Hernando County…	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I know what is expected of me in my job	71.1	24.4	3.3	1.1
I understand how my job contributes to the larger mission of the organization	78.9	18.3	2.2	0.6
My personal values are consistent with the values of the organization	48.9	41.7	6.1	3.3
I feel a sense of accomplishment in my job	57.2	34.4	6.1	2.2
I am proud of the work I do for Hernando County	70.8	22.5	3.9	2.8

However, perceptions of personal alignment with the county's values were slightly lower, but still positive overall. For example, 48.9% of employees strongly agreed that their personal values align with those of the county, while 41.7% somewhat agreed. Meanwhile, 9.4% disagreed, including 3.3% who strongly disagreed. When asked about task satisfaction, 91.6% of respondents agreed that they feel a sense of accomplishment in their job, and 93.3% reported being proud of their work.

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Equity and Inclusivity

Employees were asked whether they feel Hernando County provides a fair and inclusive work environment (Table 5). In total, 88.8% agreed that the county is an inclusive workplace, though 6.1% strongly disagreed. Similarly, 91.1% agreed that employees are treated fairly regardless of race or ethnicity, while 8.9% disagreed.

Table 5.

Equity and Inclusivity (reported as percentage of respondents by row)

Thinking about Hernando County as a place to work, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements:	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
This is an inclusive workplace	50.8	38.0	5.0	6.1
Regardless of race or ethnicity, employees are treated fairly	64.8	26.3	5.0	3.9
Regardless of gender, employees are treated fairly	60.9	27.4	7.8	3.9
Regardless of age, employees are treated fairly	63.1	25.7	6.7	4.5
We have an environment free of harassment or discrimination	50.8	35.6	7.3	6.1

Fair treatment across other demographics showed similar trends. 88.3% of employees agreed that gender does not impact fairness in treatment, while 11.7% disagreed. Responses about fair treatment regardless of age were slightly lower, with 88.8% agreeing, while 11.2% disagreed. Employees were also asked whether the workplace is free of harassment and discrimination, with 86.4% agreeing and 13.4% disagreeing, including 6.1% who strongly disagreed.

Compensation and Professional Development Opportunities

Based on the survey responses, compensation and career growth opportunities were among the most significant areas of concern for employees. When asked if they are fairly compensated for their work, 60.5% of respondents agreed, while 39.5% disagreed, including 18.9% who strongly disagreed (Table 6). Satisfaction with benefits was slightly higher, with 63.3% agreeing that they are satisfied with the benefits package, while 36.7% disagreed. In the case of benefits, the responses were notably less positive than is often seen in public sector organizations.

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Table 6.

Compensation and Professional Opportunities (reported as percentage of respondents by row)

Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following:	**Strongly Agree**	**Somewhat Agree**	**Somewhat Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
I am fairly compensated for the work I do	21.1	39.4	20.6	18.9
I'm satisfied with the benefits offered by the County	28.9	34.4	21.7	15.0
I have the materials, resources, and equipment needed to do my job well	42.8	40.0	10.6	6.7
The organization provides opportunities for professional growth and development	42.5	38.5	10.6	8.4
I can see myself being promoted within the County	35.7	40.8	16.2	7.3

Employees were also asked if they have the necessary resources to perform their job effectively, with 82.8% agreeing and 17.3% disagreeing. When it came to career advancement, 81.0% of respondents agreed that the county provides professional development opportunities, while 18.9% disagreed. The percentage of employees who see promotion opportunities within the county was lower, with 76.5% agreeing and 23.5% disagreeing, though it should be noted that this includes those who are currently nearing retirement or in terminal leadership positions.

Organizational Communications

Typically, organizational communications register as one of the most significant areas of concern for employees in public sector organizations, and a similar pattern was observed among Hernando County employees. Respondents were asked about communication effectiveness at various levels of the organization. 80.6% of respondents agreed that employees communicate effectively with one another, while 19.5% disagreed. However, perceptions of communication across departments were significantly lower. Only 58.4% agreed that departments effectively communicate with one another, while 41.7% disagreed, including 13.3% who strongly disagreed.

Organizational Communications (reported as percentage of respondents by row)

Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements about communication efforts within the organization	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Employees communicate effectively with one another	35.6	45.0	11.7	7.8
Departments effectively communicate with one another	17.8	40.6	28.3	13.3
Leaders effectively communicate problems facing the organization	22.2	43.3	24.4	10.0
Employee concerns are taken seriously	25.6	38.3	18.9	17.2

Leadership communication was another concern. 65.5% of employees agreed that county leaders effectively communicate problems facing the organization, while 34.4% disagreed. Similarly, 63.9% agreed that employee concerns are taken seriously, while 36.1% disagreed, including 17.2% who strongly disagreed. Collectively, the data suggest that strategic efforts to improve organizational communications could dramatically improve overall assessments of employee experience.

Departmental Culture

Narrowing the focus down to the department level, respondents were asked about their specific departmental culture, with a focus on morale, fairness, workload distribution, and accountability (Table 8). A majority (70.6%) of employees agreed that morale is generally good within their department, while 29.4% disagreed. Fair treatment of employees within departments received more positive responses, with 82.3% agreeing, while 17.6% disagreed.

Table 8.

Departmental Culture (reported as percentage of respondents by row)

Thinking about your department, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements:	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Morale is generally good among employees in my department	33.9	36.7	16.1	13.3
Employees in my department are treated fairly	45.6	36.7	8.9	8.9
I trust leaders in my department to act ethically	56.1	30.6	8.9	4.4
The workload in my department is fairly distributed among employees	40.6	30.6	15.6	13.3
Employees in my department are accountable for their performance	48.9	28.9	10.6	11.7

Trust in departmental leadership was relatively high, with 86.7% of employees agreeing that they trust their department leaders to act ethically. Attitudes toward workload distribution within departments were slightly more negative, with 71.2% of respondents agreeing that their department distributes work fairly, while 28.8% disagreed. Accountability within departments was also measured, with 77.8% of employees agreeing that staff are held accountable for their performance, while 22.8% disagreed.

Supervisory Relationships

Narrowing the focus down even further, the survey included several questions assessing employees relationships with their immediate supervisors. A notable majority (82.7%) of employees agreed that they receive regular feedback from their supervisor, while 17.3% disagreed (Table 9) Fair treatment of employees from supervisors was also rated highly, with 90.6% agreeing, including 73.9% who strongly agreed.

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Table 9.

Supervisor Evaluation (reported as percentage of respondents by row)

Thinking about your immediate supervisor, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements:	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I receive regular feedback from my supervisor about my performance	54.4	28.3	10.6	6.7
I believe that I am treated fairly by my supervisor	73.9	16.7	4.4	5.0
I trust my supervisor to act ethically	72.8	15.0	6.1	6.1
My supervisor is accountable to employees in the department	65.4	16.8	11.2	6.7
My supervisor upholds the values of the organization	68.3	20.0	7.2	4.4
My supervisor encourages me to come up with new and improved ways to do my job	68.9	19.4	10.6	6.1

Trust in supervisors was also strong, with 87.8% of employees agreeing that their supervisor acts ethically, and 82.2% agreeing that supervisors are held accountable. Employees were also asked if their supervisor encourages innovation and continuous improvement, with 88.3% agreeing and 11.7% disagreeing, indicating that the organization as a whole is well positioned to foster innovation and process improvement.

Organizational Leadership

Zooming out to the organizational level, the survey also examined employee attitudes toward organizational leadership, particularly at the level of the County Administrator's office. Opinions about leadership at the highest levels of county administration were somewhat more mixed than those observed at the departmental and supervisory level. For example, 62.2% of employees agreed that county leaders listen to employee opinions, while 37.2% disagreed, including 14.4% who strongly disagreed (Table 10). Ethical leadership was rated more favorably, with 70.0% agreeing that leadership acts ethically, while 23.3% disagreed.

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Organizational Leadership (reported as percentage of respondents by row)

Thinking about leaders in the Couty Administrator's Office, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements:	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Unsure
Leaders listen to employee opinions	27.8	34.4	15.0	14.4	8.3
I trust leaders in the organization to act ethically	39.4	30.6	13.3	10.0	6.7
Leaders manage costs responsibly	31.3	38.5	10.1	10.1	10.1
Leaders uphold the values of the organization	37.8	36.7	7.8	7.8	10.0
Leaders act transparently	31.3	29.1	12.3	19.0	8.4
Leaders are accountable to tax-payers and other stakeholders	38.0	33.5	8.4	11.7	8.4

Accountability of leadership to taxpayers and stakeholders was also measured, with 71.5% of employees agreeing, while 20.1% disagreed. Transparency was identified as an area of concern, as only 60.4% agreed that leaders act transparently, while 31.3% disagreed. While these numbers are less positive than those observed at the departmental level, this pattern is consistent with that observed in other public sector organizations, where "distance" often equates to less positive and trusting assessments of organizational units and actors.

Strategic Planning

Finally, employees were given an opportunity to provide additional comments about their experiences working for Hernando County in order to help inform the strategic planning process. When asked to share general comments about their employment, the most frequently mentioned theme was pay and compensation, with 28% of respondents expressing concerns about wages being lower than in comparable jurisdictions (Table 11). Many employees cited difficulties in maintaining financial stability and noted that they could earn more elsewhere, particularly in the private sector or

in other counties. Some respondents also mentioned the lack of pay increases or slow progression through salary steps as a source of frustration.

Work environment and morale were the second most common themes, with 21% of responses discussing issues related to workplace culture, lack of recognition, and declining morale. Several employees stated that they feel their contributions are not valued and that the county does not do enough to reward or acknowledge hard work. Leadership and management practices were also commonly mentioned, with 15% of responses criticizing decision-making and a perceived lack of transparency. In particular, employees voiced concerns about leadership failing to act on feedback, making unilateral decisions without employee input, and inconsistent policies across departments.

Table 11.

Content Analysis: *In the space below, please provide any additional comments that you would like to share regarding your experience working for Hernando County.*

Major Themes	% of Respondents
Pay and Compensation – Complaints about wages being lower than in neighboring counties.	28%
Work Environment & Morale – Frustration about workplace culture, lack of recognition, and declining morale.	21%
Leadership & Management – Criticism of communication and decision-making by leadership.	15%
Benefits & Policies – Concerns over changes to holidays, floating holidays, and health insurance.	12%
Job Satisfaction – Positive responses about work-life balance, coworkers, and job duties	9%
Workload & Staffing – Overwork due to understaffing	9%
Growth & Development – Complaints about lack of career advancement	7%

Other concerns included changes to benefits and policies (12%), job satisfaction (9%) workload and staffing challenges (9%), and concerns over career growth and the lack of advancement opportunities (7%), with some employees feeling that internal promotions are limited or favor certain departments over others.

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To further aid the County's strategic planning process, employees were also asked to identify what they believe to be the core values of Hernando County's government (Table 12). The most frequently cited value was integrity and ethics (25%), with many employees stating that they expect the county to operate with honesty, fairness, and accountability in all decision-making processes. Transparency and accountability were also significant themes, mentioned by 23% of employees. Respondents expressed a desire for greater openness in leadership decisions, clearer communication about organizational changes, and a stronger commitment to public accountability.

Table 12.

Content Analysis: *In your opinion, what are the core values of Hernando County's government?*

Major Themes	% of Respondents
Integrity and Ethics	25%
Transparency and Accountability	23%
Public and Community Service	20%
Efficiency and Innovation	12%
Negative Responses (i.e. complaints that the county doesn't follow these values)	20%

Public service and community engagement were identified as key values by 20% of respondents. Employees noted that their primary motivation for working in the public sector is a desire to serve the community and improve residents' quality of life. Efficiency and innovation (12%) were also mentioned, with some employees emphasizing the need for streamlined processes, modernized technology, and improved operational effectiveness to better serve both employees and the public.

Next, employees were asked to list what they believe to be the county's greatest strengths and weaknesses (Table 13). The most commonly cited strength was community and public service (29%), with employees praising the county's commitment to serving residents and maintaining a

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strong connection with the local community. Many respondents also noted dedicated employees (24%) as a major strength, stating that their colleagues are passionate, hard-working, and committed to public service despite challenges within the organization.

Table 13.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Hernando County

Major Themes	% of Respondents
I believe the County's strengths are…	
Community and Public Service	29%
Dedicated Employees	24%
Leadership and Administration	16%
Natural Environment and Infrastructure	13%
I believe the County's weaknesses are…	
Pay and Benefits	33%
Employee Retention and Turnover	22%
Leadership and Decision-Making	17%
Growth Management and Infrastructure	15%
Negative Work Environment	13%

Other frequently mentioned strengths included leadership and administration (16%), with some employees highlighting effective department-level management and positive relationships with direct supervisors. The county's natural environment and infrastructure (13%) were also cited as assets, with employees emphasizing the benefits of living and working in a community with well-maintained public spaces and essential infrastructure.

On the other hand, the most commonly mentioned weakness was pay and benefits (33%), reflecting widespread concerns about salary competitiveness and the perceived inadequacy of the

county's benefits package. Employee retention and turnover (22%) was another major concern, with employees noting that high turnover rates and difficulty attracting talent create additional workload burdens for those who remain.

Leadership and decision-making were cited as weaknesses by 17% of employees, with criticism directed toward a perceived lack of transparency, inconsistent policies, and poor responsiveness to employee concerns. Growth management and infrastructure (15%) was another area of concern, with some employees stating that the county is struggling to manage population growth and infrastructure demands effectively. Finally, 13% of respondents mentioned negative work environment issues, including workplace politics, favoritism, and lack of recognition.

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Finally, employees were asked to provide recommendations on what Hernando County should start doing, stop doing, and continue doing to improve workplace satisfaction and effectiveness (Table 14). The most common recommendation for what the county should start doing was increasing pay and benefits (32%). Many employees urged leadership to conduct salary studies, adjust wages to match market rates, and improve benefits such as retirement contributions and healthcare options. Another 18% of respondents recommended improving communication and transparency, with suggestions for more town hall meetings, open-door policies, and clear explanations of policy changes. Better training and development opportunities (16%) were also suggested, with employees calling for stronger leadership training, skills workshops, and tuition reimbursement programs. Improved employee recognition (14%) was also noted, with employees advocating for more formal recognition programs, bonuses, and promotions based on merit. Finally, 11% of employees suggested improving growth management and infrastructure, noting that county resources need to keep pace with population growth and increased service demands.

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Table 14.

What Hernando County Should Start Doing, Stop Doing, and Continue Doing

Major Themes	% of Respondents
We Should Start…	
Increase Pay and Benefits	32%
Improve Communication and Transparency	18%
Offer Better Training and Development	16%
Improve Employee Recognition	14%
Manage Growth More Effectively	11%
We Should Stop…	
Cutting Benefits and Pay	29%
Poor Hiring Practices	22%
Overdevelopment	20%
Bureaucratic Inefficiencies	17%
Political Decision Making	12%
We Should Continue…	
Employee Benefits and Support	28%
Community Engagement and Services	23%

Regarding what the county should stop doing, the most common concern was cutting benefits and pay (29%). Many employees expressed frustration over perceived reductions in benefits and wage stagnation. Another 22% urged leadership to stop poor hiring practices, including nepotism, favoritism, and inconsistent promotion policies. Overdevelopment (20%) was another

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concern, with employees stating that growth is outpacing the county's ability to maintain adequate infrastructure and services. Bureaucratic inefficiencies (17%) were also mentioned, with employees calling for streamlined processes, faster decision-making, and less red tape. Political decision-making (12%) was another issue raised, with concerns that organizational policies and budget decisions are being influenced by politics rather than practical needs.

In terms of what the county should continue doing, 28% of employees praised employee benefits and support programs, stating that the existing retirement options, leave policies, and health benefits are strong and should not be reduced. Another 23% of respondents emphasized the importance of community engagement and public services, urging the county to maintain high standards for resident services and ensure that employees remain focused on their public service mission.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The 2025 Hernando County Employee Engagement Survey provides a comprehensive assessment of employees' experiences, perceptions, and concerns across multiple workplace dimensions. While the results highlight several strengths, including employees' commitment to public service and strong relationships with direct supervisors, they also underscore several opportunities for improvement, such as workplace morale, compensation, organizational communications, and career advancement opportunities.

The following recommendations are designed to address key concerns identified in the survey and to help Hernando County create a more engaged, motivated, and satisfied workforce. These recommendations focus on actionable strategies that can enhance employee retention, improve organizational transparency, and strengthen leadership effectiveness.

1. **Improve Workplace Morale and Employee Recognition:** While a significant percentage of employees enjoy their jobs, overall morale remains an area of concern. Less than 20% of employees strongly agreed that workplace morale is high, and nearly 40% disagreed. Additionally, 45.5% of employees rated Hernando County as only a "Fair" place to work, indicating room for strategies to boost engagement and satisfaction. To improve morale, Hernando County leadership should consider the following:

a. ***Enhance Employee Recognition Programs:*** Establish a structured recognition program that acknowledges outstanding performance through awards, public recognition, or additional incentives. Regular appreciation events and peer-nominated awards could help foster a more positive workplace culture.

b. ***Strengthen Team Building Initiatives:*** Implement department-level and county-wide team-building activities that encourage collaboration, increase engagement, and improve interdepartmental relationships.

c. ***Conduct Morale-Focused Listening Sessions:*** Organize regular town halls or focus groups to provide employees with a platform to discuss workplace concerns and propose solutions directly to leadership.

2. **Address Compensation and Career Growth Concerns:** Survey results indicate that 39.5% of employees disagreed that they are fairly compensated, including 18.9% who strongly disagreed. Additionally, only 35.7% of employees strongly agreed that they see opportunities for promotion within the county, and open-ended responses highlighted dissatisfaction with wage progression and career advancement opportunities. To enhance employee retention and satisfaction, the county should consider the following:

a. ***Conduct a Salary Benchmarking Study:*** Evaluate salaries across similar jurisdictions to determine whether Hernando County's pay structure remains competitive. Adjust compensation where necessary to ensure equity and competitiveness.

b. ***Develop Clear Career Advancement Pathways:*** Implement structured career progression plans that outline potential growth opportunities, required skills, and training programs to help employees advance.

c. ***Expand Professional Development Offerings:*** Increase investment in leadership training, skills development, and mentorship programs to prepare employees for internal promotion opportunities.

3. **Strengthen Organizational Communication and Transparency:** While employees generally trust their immediate supervisors, feedback on county leadership was more mixed. Only 62.2% of employees believe that senior leaders listen to employee opinions, and 37.2% disagreed, including 14.4% who strongly disagreed. Additionally, 31.3% of employees disagreed that county leaders act transparently. To build trust and improve communication, Hernando County leadership should consider the following:

a. ***Increase Leadership Visibility and Engagement:*** Encourage senior leaders to conduct regular site visits, attend departmental meetings, and interact directly with employees to better understand their concerns.

b. ***Enhance Transparency in Decision-Making:*** Establish clear communication channels for policy changes, salary adjustments, and strategic decisions. Providing employees with a rationale for leadership decisions can help reduce frustration and build trust.

c. ***Implement a Leadership Feedback Mechanism:*** Develop a structured feedback loop where employees can provide direct, anonymous input on leadership performance and county policies.

4. **Improve Interdepartmental Communication and Collaboration:** While most employees believe that they communicate effectively within their departments, cross-departmental communication remains a challenge. Only 58.4% of employees agreed that departments effectively communicate with one another, while 41.7% disagreed. To improve interdepartmental collaboration, the county should consider the following:

a. ***Create Cross-Departmental Task Forces:*** Establish committees that bring together employees from different departments to work on joint initiatives, increasing communication and reducing silos.

b. ***Standardize Communication Practices:*** Develop county-wide guidelines for internal communication, ensuring consistent information flow across all departments.

c. ***Implement a Centralized Information Hub:*** Consider adopting a digital platform where departments can share updates, resources, and announcements to improve accessibility and transparency.

5. **Enhance Retention Efforts to Address Employee Turnover:** A notable concern among employees was high turnover and difficulties retaining skilled workers. 22% of employees mentioned retention challenges in open-ended responses, and 33% cited pay and benefits as a weakness. To improve employee retention, Hernando County should consider the following:

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a. ***Develop an Employee Retention Strategy:*** Conduct exit interviews and stay interviews to identify specific reasons for turnover and implement targeted interventions to improve retention rates.

b. ***Offer More Flexible Work Options:*** Where feasible, explore alternative work arrangements such as hybrid schedules or compressed workweeks to improve work-life balance.

c. ***Increase Investment in Employee Well-Being:*** Expand mental health resources, stress management programs, and wellness initiatives to support employees in managing job-related stress.

6. **Address Concerns Over Growth Management and Infrastructure:** Survey responses indicated that employees believe Hernando County is struggling to keep pace with growth. 20% of employees cited overdevelopment as a concern, and 15% mentioned infrastructure challenges. To address these concerns, leadership should consider the following:

a. ***Develop a Workforce Growth Plan:*** Ensure staffing levels align with increasing service demands, reducing workload imbalances and preventing burnout.

b. ***Strengthen Infrastructure Planning Efforts:*** Collaborate with planning and public works departments to ensure that county resources are effectively allocated to meet community growth needs.

c. ***Improve Transparency in Growth-Related Decisions:*** Clearly communicate how growth management strategies impact county employees and involve them in planning discussions when appropriate.

7. **Reinforce Organizational Values:** In open-ended questions, 20% of respondents stated that they do not believe the county upholds the values it promotes. To ensure alignment with core values, the county should consider the following:

a. ***Enhance Value Alignment:*** County effort to focus more on public service motivation and Hernando County's organizational vision, mission, goals, and objectives.

b. ***Regularly Assess Workplace Culture:*** Conduct annual surveys and focus groups to measure progress on inclusivity efforts and identify areas for improvement.

c. ***Strengthen Ethical Leadership Practices:*** Demonstrate that county leadership is held accountable for upholding ethical decision-making and maintaining a workplace culture rooted in fairness and respect.

The 2025 Hernando County Employee Engagement Survey highlights areas of strength and opportunities for growth. While employees are dedicated to their roles and value public service, challenges related to morale, compensation, leadership communication, and career advancement should be addressed to ensure a thriving workplace environment. By implementing the recommendations outlined in this report, Hernando County can foster a more engaged workforce, improve employee retention, and build a stronger organizational culture that supports both employees and the community they serve. The survey results provide a foundation for ongoing dialogue and continuous improvement, ensuring that employee voices remain central to the county's future strategic planning efforts.

Hernando County Employee Focus Group
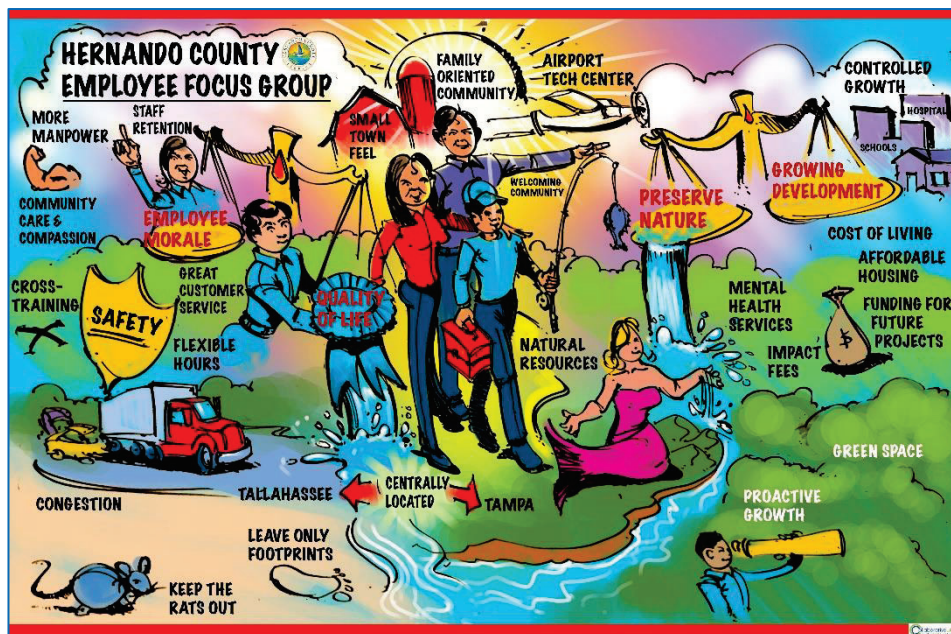
Real-Time Record

March 27, 2025

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What do we value most about Hernando County – Our Greatest Strengths/Treasures?
• **Natural Resources (i.e. waterways, springs, hiking trails, etc.) – 17%** • **Rural Character and Agricultural Lifestyle – 12%** • **Access to Gulf Waters for Recreation – 12%** • **Small-Town Feel – 11%** • Public Safety – 10% • Friendly and Welcoming Community – 7% • Limited Development – 7% • Proximity to Major Urban Areas – 7% • Undeveloped Beaches/Waterfront – 6% • Airport – 6% • Growing Community – 4% • Other – TBD – 0%

What are the most important Opportunities to address in the future?
• **Preserving the Nature Coast – 15%** • **Maintaining the Rural County Character – 12%** • **Road Expansion – 12%** • **Balancing Preservation of Natural Resources with Growth and Development – 11%** • Protecting Greenspaces and the Tree Canopy – 9% • Ensuring Adequate Water Quality and Supply – 9% • Improving/Expanding Access to Medical and Mental Health Services – 7% • Investing in Workforce Development – 6% • Investing in the infrastructure needed to support the new developments – 7% • Promoting Affordable Housing Growth (with Infrastructure Support) – 6% • Promoting Affordable Housing Growth (with Infrastructure Support) – 2% • Expanding Business Support Services – 4% • Other – TBD – 0%

What Visionary Goals are most important for Hernando County's ideal future?

- **Infrastructure to support sustainability, quality of life, and environment. – 19%**
- **Reduce homelessness within County urban areas – 17%**
- **Develop a strategy to address employee compensation and career growth concerns for enhanced retention efforts and succession planning – 16%**
- Complete land conservation vision (Florida wildlife corridor) – 14%
- Enforce current zoning laws with enhanced employment and training for code enforcement - use what we got! – 13%
- Alignment of the strategic plan with the comprehensive plan (land use)...appropriate funding for infrastructure... / Responsible Land use & following the 2040 Comp Plan/ Enforce and review the comprehensive plan according to exist – 10%
- Determine funding plan for strategic initiatives – 6%
- Create an on-going mechanism for gathering feedback from the community, stakeholders and residents – 4%
- Other – TBD – 1%

Top Strengths

- **Attractive Natural Resources and Amenities (i.e., parks, recreation) – 21%**
- **Close proximity to major urban areas (Tampa/St. Pete, Orlando) – 14%**
- **Assisting Veterans with their disabilities – 14%**
- Cost of Living is Affordable – 12%
- Great customer service – 12%
- Collaboration, we all work together for the same residents – 12%
- Family-oriented community (schools, government, parks, sports) – 10%
- As county employees, we are motivated by care/compassion for our community – 5%
- Sharing of information and transparency – 0%

Top Weaknesses

- **Congestion is growing - need updated infrastructure – 22%**
- **Finding funding for future projects – 22%**
- **Employment opportunities need improvement-needs variation – 19%**
- More manpower to accommodate the developmental growth of Hernando County – 16%
- Funding mechanisms to make enhancements and improvements per desired strategic plan – 13%
- Affordable housing and mental health services – 9%

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Top Opportunities
• **Staff retention, salaries, hiring, staff development – 17%**
• **Flexible work schedule, in order to improve work/life balance – 17%**
• **Pass the whole cent sales tax next time, to make improvements – 17%**
• Lack of training/cross-training within department, but across departments. – 14%
• Limit access to developers – 14%
• More fiscal responsibility on developers – 14%
• Communication regarding personnel policies needs enhancement – 7%

Top Threats
• **Fear of rapid growth; overpopulation/congestion – 19%**
• **Fear of the loss of current natural/agricultural ambiance-hometown feel – 17%**
• **Damage to our natural resources – 17%**
• Funding (taxation reluctance) – 14%
• Wildlife displacement vs. development – 11%
• Population growth will hamper county infrastructure – 8%
• Increase police action with drugs – 8%
• Competition with neighboring counties for desirable/high paying employers – 6%

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Agenda

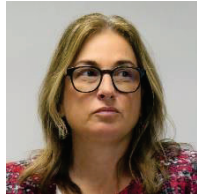|	
2:00pm – 2:15pm	**Welcome: Project Overview & Approach** **Information Collected to Date & Engagement Highlights** • Angela Crist, The John Scott Dailey, Florida Institute of Government *engagehernando.com/strategicplan*
2:15pm – 4:15pm (including 15-minute break) pollev.com/colabs	**Collaborative Activities:** **Full Group Polling: Characteristics We Value Most & Top Future Opportunities** • Andrea Henning, Collaborative Labs at St. Petersburg College **Team Breakouts: SWOT: Priority Areas** • Andrea Henning, Collaborative Labs at St. Petersburg College • Angela Crist, The John Scott Dailey Florida Institute of Government & John Daly, Ph.D., Associate Professor, School of Public Affairs, University of South Florida
4:15pm – 4:30pm	**Wrap-Up & Next Steps for Success:** **Anticipated Timeline** **Questions & Next Steps** • Angela Crist, The John Scott Dailey Florida Institute of Government

Addendum: Previous Hernando Engagement Priorities

Hernando County Strengths/Treasures	Future Opportunities to Address
• Natural Resources (i.e. waterways, springs, hiking trails, etc.) • Rural Character and Agricultural Lifestyle • Small-Town Feel • Public Safety • Friendly and Welcoming Community • Access to Gulf Waters for Recreation • Undeveloped Beaches/Waterfront • Limited Development • Growing Community • Proximity to Major Urban Areas • Other - TBD	• Preserving the Nature Coast • Maintaining the Rural County Character • Balancing Preservation of Natural Resources with Growth and Development • Expanding Business Support Services • Improving/Expanding Access to Medical and Mental Health Services • Investing in Workforce Development Promoting Affordable Housing Growth (with Infrastructure Support) • Protecting Greenspaces and the Tree Canopy • Ensuring Adequate Water Quality and Supply • Other - TBD

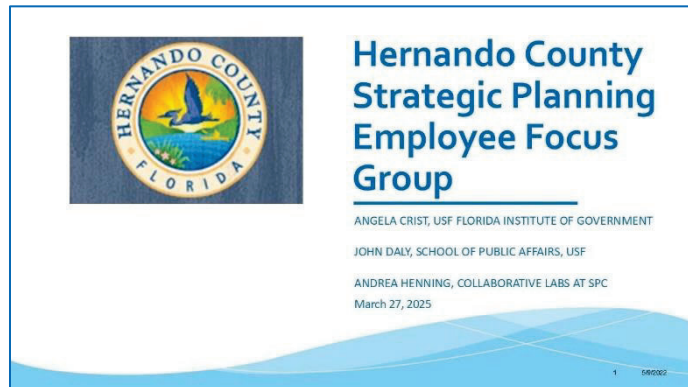| Top 2030 Visionary Goals |
|---|
| • Alignment of the strategic plan with the comprehensive plan (land use) and appropriate funding for infrastructure to support projected growth/Responsible Land use & following the 2040 Comp Plan/ Enforce and review the comprehensive plan according to existing county policy.
• Infrastructure to support sustainability, quality of life, and environment.
• Complete land conservation vision (Florida wildlife corridor)
• Enforce current zoning laws with enhanced employment and training for code enforcement - use what we got!
• Reduce homelessness within County urban areas
• Other - TBD |

Welcome: Project Overview & Approach

Angela Crist, USF Florida Institute of Government: Thank you for taking the time to be here today. I'm joined today by John Daly, Associate Professor at USF's School of Public Affairs, and Andrea with Collaborative Labs and her team. How many have been to engagehernando.com/strategicplan?

Several participants indicated they had.

Those who haven't, please go there to see our methodology and process, along with all of the Real-time Records (RTRs) that capture each session. The County engaged us and liked our participatory process that builds from one step to the next. At the end of Phase 1, we'll begin to see strategic themes from the data, some of which we're using tonight.

Phase 2 is where county commissioners come together with leadership to define the themes, goals and objectives, followed by a final draft report -- fluid and flexible. From there, the County may come up with five to seven priority goals you'll work on. Phase 3 is implementation, determining strategies and embedding them into the existing culture, not creating additional work. And the County will do quarterly updates with Andrea and the Collaborative Labs team. The final draft report is anticipated late fall. We've conducted a resident and an employee survey.

PROJECT PLAN & Information Collected to Date

What are we doing and why?

What is your role in the process?

What are those key dates for your engagement?

Phase One		
1.1	Kick Off and Work Plan Refinement	October 28, 2024
1.2	Commission: Strategic Alignment Workshop & Setting Expectations	November 21, 2024
1.3	Communications Outreach	Ongoing
1.4	Citizen Engagement Session	December 18, 2024
1.5	Individual/Group Stakeholder Interviews	January 2025
1.6	Resident Feedback Survey	January 2025
1.7	Community Focus Group Forum I (2 hours)	February 4, 2025
1.8	Employee Survey	February 2025
1.9	Employee Focus Group Forum (3 hours)	March 27, 2025
1.10	Community Focus Group Forum II (2 hours)	April 4, 2025
1.11	Commission Presentation: Review info-to-date and Next Steps	May 2025
Phase Two		
2.1	Leadership Forum I (4 hours) off-site	June 2025
2.2	County Administrator & Executive Leadership Planning Meeting	June 2025
2.3	Leadership Forum II (3 hours) off-site	July 2025
2.4	County Administrator & Executive Leadership Planning Meeting	August 2025
2.5	Final Report Internal Review	September 2025
2.6	Final Report to Commission Workshop	October 2025
Phase Three:		
3.1	Strategies for supporting the implementation plan	November 2025
3.2	Implementation plan facilitation	November 2026

I'll quickly share high level takeaways from each survey:

Resident Survey

- Around general satisfaction around quality of life in Hernando County, over 60% rated excellent or good. But interesting, 30% rated quality of life as fair or poor and want to see improvements for resident experiences and perceptions. So it may be a quality of life perception issue, not really fair or poor.
- Traffic was one of the highest when asked about raising concern/dissatisfaction.
- Roadways/infrastructure haven't caught up with growth.
- Public safety: Fire/EMS received high ratings. Almost 30% still indicated dissatisfaction with overall safety. We don't know the disconnect.
- Economic development: Only 1.2% rated the County as an excellent place to earn a wage. Definitely room for improvement.
- Growth management: 58% identified unregulated growth. That's very high.
- Community services: Very satisfied with parks, libraries, and preserves. But not so for affordable housing, healthcare, and some potential recreational facilities.
- Communications: Residents indicated a demand for improved transparency and having more information. We don't know if goes to elected officials or County government.

These are on engagehernando.com/strategicplan and we'll dive into this more today.

Employee Survey

- Morale is relatively high. But there are some opportunities for improvement; the biggest being around work-life balance and workplace culture.
- 94% of employees like their job; yet only 60% look forward to going to work most days.
- 95% agree they know what's expected in their role.
- 97% understand how their job contributes to the organization's mission. But only 48% strongly agree their personal values align with County's. That's lower than we'd like to see.
- Communication and transparency: 83% felt they receive regular feedback from their supervisor.
- 90% feel they're treated fairly by their supervisor.
- However: 31% of employees disagreed that County leaders act transparently. So there is opportunity for openness in decision-making.
- Big theme: Employees value public service but cite employee retention, growth management, and workplace challenges as areas needing improvement.
- 33% feel pay and benefits are a weakness.
- 22% mentioned retention and turnover.

Speaker: Percentages are relative. How many respondents were there to each survey?

Angela: The employee survey went to 861 and there were 180 responses with a 20.9% response rate.

Speaker: Do you have the occupation breakdown?

Angela: Yes, but I don't have that right now. 959 completed the community survey. Dr. Neely is our statistician in USF's School of Public Affairs. While his analysis is not final, he said respondents were diverse including a wide range of ages, genders, and income levels. Some groups were over- or underrepresented. The survey sample had a higher percentage of female respondents than the overall population; 72% were female, yet only 51% of the County is female. We work with Sarasota County too and our threshold is 1,500 responses, demographically and geographically weighted. For you to have 959 is very good.

John Daly, School of Public Affairs, USF: 20% means 80% have not responded so your voice is important. Please speak up.

Andrea Henning, Executive Director, Collaborative Labs: Thanks for getting us primed and ready. I echo those sentiments and I'm grateful for your attendance today. Of the 800+ Hernando County employees, we have the A-team here today.

Agenda Overview

➤ Andrea Henning, Dina Vann, PJ Petrick, Jonathan Massie, Collaborative Labs at SPC

It's so good to be back in God's country.

We've had a good time with commissioners, leadership, and citizens who are passionate, engaged, and have high expectations for the future of this county. Employees are the heartbeat of any county. Let me introduce my team. Dina will capture what is done today in our RTR. PJ is our technologist who will help you with the technology in your breakouts. Jonathan listens with a lens of what Hernando County will look like in 2030, our north star, to render a full-color, digitized vision mural in the RTR.

We'll revisit some great goals and nuggets gathered in previous sessions to do some polling and SWOT analysis in small teams.

Now, we'll launch three polls. Please enter your name when you get into the polling software.

We'll start with the greatest treasures/strengths of Hernando County. The things you see here were rolled up from previous sessions. If you have one that's not there, click #12 and we'll ask you what that is. Pick all of the ones that speak to you.

AGENDA

➢Polls: Characteristics We Value Most,
  Top Future Opportunities & Visionary Goals

➢Breakout Teams: S.W.O.T.

➢Wrap Up and Next Steps to Engage

Prioritize: Characteristics We Value Most, Top Future Opportunities & Visionary Goals

➢What are our greatest strengths/treasures we can leverage as we create Hernando County's Strategic Plan for the future?

➢What are our most important opportunities to address for the future of Hernando County?

➢What are our Visionary Goals for Hernando County in 2030?

Characteristics We Value Most

What do we value most about Hernando County – Our Greatest Strengths/Treasures?
• **Natural Resources (i.e. waterways, springs, hiking trails, etc.) – 17%**
• **Rural Character and Agricultural Lifestyle – 12%**
• **Access to Gulf Waters for Recreation – 12%**
• **Small-Town Feel – 11%**
• Public Safety – 10%
• Friendly and Welcoming Community – 7%
• Limited Development – 7%
• Proximity to Major Urban Areas – 7%
• Undeveloped Beaches/Waterfront – 6%
• Airport – 6%
• Growing Community – 4%
• Other – TBD – 0%

Andrea: There's a lot of energy around natural resources. Does anyone want to comment on why it's so important?

Mike Steele, Code Enforcement: It's what brought people here. Built on rock mines. Other side: Beaches and waterways you want to maintain. Take only memories, leave only footprints.

Andrea: How about rural character?

Mike: You're seeing farmhouses and places with acres of land. It used to be one car going up the driveway, now it's 200 houses. It's disheartening.

Andrea: Small town feel. Who wants to comment on that?

Speaker: I think we're past that. That got blown out of the water 10 years ago.

Andrea: How about public safety and friendly and welcoming?

Art Grzyb, Planning: It's a nice community. Nice to be here. Like you said, it's God's country. Those here a while do feel it's getting pretty populated. But there are still a lot of nice people. Mostly Brooksville, not Spring Hill so much.

Mike: If you take care of the first two, they take care of everything else. Smaller feels safe and friendly and welcoming.

John Daly: This can also be influenced by whether you're a long-term resident or a transplant from somewhere else. Someone coming from a high crime area may feel differently.

Andrea: Friendly and welcoming. I feel that here each time. How about access to gulf waters?
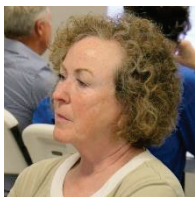
Kim Poppke, Business Development: That's one of our assets. It's Florida, surrounded by water. Our area is unique because it's more estuary and not as built up.

Angela: Can I get clarification? In a lot of other communities that are coastal, we see just "access to gulf waters." You have "for recreation." Can you expand?

Kim: Hernando Beach is a nice boating community. And gulf access for recreation and fishing.

Angela: Are there more public opportunities for people?

Speaker: There's so much kayaking and recreational fishing. Not just waterways. It's access to gulf waters.

John: Weeki Wachee River used to be a great place to go. You could always get on that. Bay News 9 put it on the news and now we can't get on it ourselves anymore.

Andrea: Let's talk about limited development.

John: Our development is ridiculous now. We can't keep up and that goes hand in hand with roadways and safety.

Andrea: A growing community.

Angela: One thing I'm also seeing in stakeholder interviews is diversity of population that's happening. So we should have framed growing community differently. That may mean growth and development. But it's not what that means. It's more diverse population in terms of not just retirees, but maybe younger families. Are you seeing that?

Egle: Schools needs have increased.

Andrea: Proximity to major urban areas, who chose that?

**Mike:** Daytona, an FSU game, it's a day trip. I like that.

Amy: We can get to Tampa quickly to shop and eat. We like going to Tampa for those things, yet having it smaller here with options.

Andrea: Who wants to address airport?

Kim: It's the airport and technology center. The biggest employment/business center, it's 2,400 acres. We have a lot of our largest manufacturers in the County there that you don't see because it's so large. Just calling it the airport is sometimes off-putting for some people because we don't have commercial service. We're general aviation with a lot of student traffic and business jets. That's because we have a great asset near us, TIA. Brooksville Airport and Technological Center is only two stoplights to TIA on the Suncoast. Studies have been done about having commercial aviation here, and it just doesn't make sense.

Angela: So it's Airport & Technology Center.
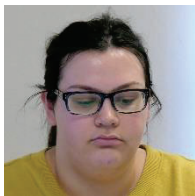
Madison Brannon, Airport Operations: A lot of people don't agree with us not being commercial.

Andrea: No one chose other, so this must be a comprehensive list. That's great. Any other clarifications?

John Daly: Seems like quality of life is very important to a lot of you.

Top Future Opportunities

Andrea: Now we'll look at the top opportunities for Hernando County. Again, these came up in previous sessions. Choose all that stand out to you.

What are the most important Opportunities to address in the future?
• **Preserving the Nature Coast – 15%**
• **Maintaining the Rural County Character – 12%**
• **Road Expansion – 12%**
• **Balancing Preservation of Natural Resources with Growth and Development – 11%**
• Protecting Greenspaces and the Tree Canopy – 9%
• Ensuring Adequate Water Quality and Supply – 9%
• Improving/Expanding Access to Medical and Mental Health Services – 7%
• Investing in Workforce Development – 6%
• Investing in the infrastructure needed to support the new developments – 7%
• Promoting Affordable Housing Growth (with Infrastructure Support) – 6%
• Promoting Affordable Housing Growth (with Infrastructure Support) – 2%
• Expanding Business Support Services – 4%
• Other – TBD – 0%

Note: Affordable housing was inadvertently listed twice.

Andrea: Preserving the nature coast and maintaining the rural county character are critical opportunities. Who wants to address balancing preservation?

John: That's big. If you protect natural resources including food and farming, it will go hand in hand with maintaining the rural county character. They take care of each other.

Andrea: How about expanding mental health?
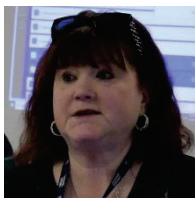
Colleen: I work for Library Services and there are a lot more homeless coming in now to our four branches. They need help with housing. We try to refer them to the resources available. We need more help with mental health. We have two mental health officers now and need more of that for a growing community like ours.

Andrea: Investing in workforce development?

Mike: Management training prepares people. You have great people in place that can train. I know guys in this room that are the only ones who know where pipes are, etc. We also need to make it a place they want to stay. To get people who thirst for that knowledge you need to make it contagious.

John Daly: How would you address succession planning?

Mike: Overlap. Unions have been in place in the past, which takes away from grooming because there must be equal opportunity. But you don't want it to become "that's the way we've always done it." Those are the challenges, but part of developing your own workforce. You can hire 100 people, but will they show up tomorrow or 10 years from now? That's what you want. You want good pay and good education. But life's the only thing that really educates you. Mix it up.

Andrea: Be always in the process of passing baton to someone else.

Mike: And they have to be in the habit of taking it.

John Daly: If you're in mid-level leadership and you're so good at what you do but have no one else to do it, your own opportunity for growth is stunted because you're too valuable in the position you're in.

Mike: Or you have great skills but no one has mentored to show you how to be a leader.

Andrea: How about affordable housing growth?

Art: It's a double edge sword. We want more affordable housing because everyone deserves that. But not too much because we don't want to overgrow.

Andrea: Protecting green spaces and the tree canopy.

Amy: I love all the animals. I live in Brooksville and our neighborhood used to have so many deer. There are less and less now. Everything is being mowed down.

Mike: Look at the coyotes. In Spring Hill, you see two of them walking across the street.

Amy: They're getting pushed out of their own area.

Andrea: Water quality. You have the best water.

John: We're constantly working on that. The flip side is we worry about sewer going out. Growth affects that and we have to keep upgrading. Infrastructure is a constant battle.

John Daly: How is it with aging?

John: It's aging. Before the ink dries, we're already in for another $10 million upgrade. New subdevelopments means land must be donated to put more wells in.

Andrea: And there were no others noted, so this was another comprehensive list.

Visionary Goals

Andrea: These are for 2030. What do we need to address in our strategic plan in the next five years? Once again, please select all that apply.

What Visionary Goals are most important for Hernando County's ideal future?
• **Infrastructure to support sustainability, quality of life, and environment. – 19%**
• **Reduce homelessness within County urban areas – 17%**
• **Develop a strategy to address employee compensation and career growth concerns for enhanced retention efforts and succession planning – 16%**
• Complete land conservation vision (Florida wildlife corridor) – 14%
• Enforce current zoning laws with enhanced employment and training for code enforcement - use what we got! – 13%
• Alignment of the strategic plan with the comprehensive plan (land use)...appropriate funding for infrastructure... / Responsible Land use & following the 2040 Comp Plan/ Enforce and review the comprehensive plan according to exist – 10%
• Determine funding plan for strategic initiatives – 6%
• Create an on-going mechanism for gathering feedback from the community, stakeholders and residents – 4%
• Other – TBD – 1%

Andrea: Who put other and would you like to share it?

Egle: Talking about expansion growth we should also address safety. Safety of living may be related to safety on the roads. In general observation, coming from other areas, our roads are narrow with no sidewalks. Taking care of some of those issues will create a safe place to live.

Angela: Question on ongoing mechanism for gathering feedback. There's a disconnect. Residents don't feel things are transparent. As employees, do you feel there is a mechanism?

Mike: In this environment, you also must remember people live here and there are employees. There may be reluctance. A huge variable goes into that. When you talk community, you get the same five noise makers. It becomes redundant and people turn hearing and listening off. It's unfortunate, but I see it in specific neighborhoods like Weeki Wachi and Mud River. You have a team effort, then there's two teams, then three because of disagreements. Everyone starts to corner the market on what's fun, festivals, river patrol, community watch. It all turns into an argument. Boards change hands. It accelerates more and more with growth. People get ostracized. It becomes hard to blend.

Mary Elwin, Transportation Div (MPO): I agree with Mike. Regarding the funding plan comment: Roads don't build themselves. If you don't have funding streams commensurate with what you're trying to accomplish in the strategic plan, it will not bear fruit. A funding plan is so important to develop and get everyone on board to get the initiatives moving forward with momentum. It got 6%, but if you don't have the money, you can't do things.

John Daly: That is significant. You mentioned roads and development. 80% of the roads funding comes from federal government, which is looking to reduce support for a lot of things. "What if" scenarios may be "what if we lose funding down the road, how do we continue to sustain them?"

Mary: A lot of people don't understand that local roads are paid by local funds.

John Daly: Excise taxes and gasoline.

Team Breakouts: SWOT: Priority Areas

Andrea: Ready to deploy and talk SWOT? We'll have four teams for this 100,000-foot view. You as employees have a focused perspective, but we want you to focus on the full array of the strategic view for your county.

Each team will elect a keyboarder to handle the intuitive software. Elect a spokesperson to share your team's top two ideas. You'll see each team's ideas flowing in. Then you'll pick two strengths that are mission critical, non-negotiable and drag the green sticky dots to them. You can choose another team's with your sticky dots. Alignment is important around these SWOTs. You'll do this for all elements of SWOT. Then we'll review together and further prioritize using your cell phones to pick your personal preferences to further elevate the group's consensus.

Teams brainstormed, then reconvened as a large group for report outs.

Andrea: Great work! You're accelerated overachievers. I'm impressed with how you dove right in and got to work. Exceptional. We have 16 of you representing Hernando County. No pressure, but a lot is weighing on you. Spread the word on what we're doing here. Share what we've been able to accomplish. Pull out your cell phones because we'll do team reports, plus prioritize individually in the midst of those. This time you won't select all that apply but narrow to your top five.

Strengths

So let's hear from your spokespeople about what strengths you chose.

Team 1

Amy: We said great customer service, assisting veterans with disabilities, and sharing information/transparency as our top ones.

Team 2

Mike: Ours falls into customer service, but as county employees, we're motivated by care and compassion for our community. We're part of it and proud of it. We also said collaboration, we all work for the same residents. We all live here too.

Team 3

John: We selected other teams' ideas.

Team 4

Art: Cost of living affordable. That's important for the area. And attractive natural resources and amenities like parks and recommendation and county functions.
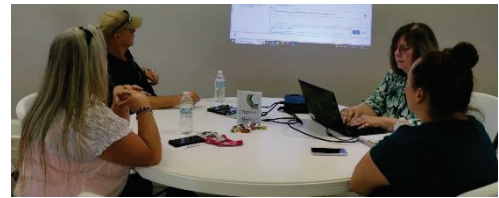
Andrea: And some bonus strengths below. Family oriented community, close proximity to major urban areas. Overachievers. Any clarifications needed? Reflections?

John Daly: Looks like good cooperation across employees across the departments. That's a needed element for a good culture. And service oriented mentality is important component. Caring and compassion for your community.

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Top Strengths
• **Attractive Natural Resources and Amenities (i.e., parks, recreation) – 21%**
• **Close proximity to major urban areas (Tampa/St. Pete, Orlando) – 14%**
• **Assisting Veterans with their disabilities – 14%**
• Cost of Living is Affordable – 12%
• Great customer service – 12%
• Collaboration, we all work together for the same residents – 12%
• Family-oriented community (schools, government, parks, sports) – 10%
• As county employees, we are motivated by care/compassion for our community – 5%
• Sharing of information and transparency – 0%

These are the remaining strengths brainstormed by the teams:
- Growing community
- Natural resources
- Making sure the contractors are registered and licensed in Hernando County. =License contractors
- Access to all information available in the library
- Attractive hometown feel
- Engaging platform

Andrea: Well done. Let's go to the second bucket.

Weaknesses

Team 1

Amy: Affordable housing and mental health services was what we chose.

Andrea: Do you recall selecting any other teams' weaknesses? It looks like you may have. The reason this list is so concise is because several teams selected the same one, showing alignment. It's good.

Team 2

Mike: We said to increase the manpower internally as an organization to accommodate more residents expecting the same service. Second, better communication among all organizations externally: State, SWFWMD, federal. Understanding what they do so no one's time is wasted. And that happens internally with new-hires. They don't understand the moving parts of the big machine.

Team 3

John: We think the biggest weakness is finding funding for future projects. We talked about the growth coming in and the constant problem with keeping up with infrastructure including landfill, water, sewer, roads, and the fire department.

Team 4

Art: We had three: Congestion is growing. We need infrastructure to support the growth. There are 17-18 subdivisions going in and that doesn't include the couple thousand single builds. To match that, you need schools and hospitals. And that costs a lot. Also employment opportunities need improvement and more variation, more opportunities for people to stay employed. We just voted down a half-cent sales tax. That could've helped the road.

Mike: And that could come from visitors too.

Art: And funding mechanisms for enhancements/improvements for the desired strategic plan. Based on the results here, we still need funding.

Andrea: That mirrors finding funding for future projects chosen by Team 3.

John Daly: Pretty universal. Resources needed to fuel future services. Hernando County will be hurting without them.

Andrea: Great work.

Top Weaknesses
• **Congestion is growing - need updated infrastructure – 22%**
• **Finding funding for future projects – 22%**
• **Employment opportunities need improvement-needs variation – 19%**
• More manpower to accommodate the developmental growth of Hernando County – 16%
• Funding mechanisms to make enhancements and improvements per desired strategic plan – 13%
• Affordable housing and mental health services – 9%

These are the remaining weaknesses brainstormed by the teams:
- Over - Construction of Spring Hill
- More collaborative efforts with other county departments, better communication among departments
- We can improve upon communication with external agencies (State, Federal, SWFWMD etc.)
- Staff shortage
- Better incentives to keep the workforce local (attracting new people, plus retaining employees)
- Congestion all of Hernando County

Opportunities

Team 1

Amy: Limiting access to developers. And like you said before, the sales tax to make the improvements needed.

Angela: Limit developer access. Can you provide more context?

Amy: Not allowing so much growth to come in.

Angela: Residential? Commercial?

Many participants indicated it is both.

Angela: Limit access, is that not allowing them to do it?

Robert Werts, Veterans Services: Restriction on how many homes go in an area. If you go down Anderson Snow Road, you drive by a development and you can jump from house to house. It's turning into concrete jungle, which we want to avoid. No zero lot lines to developers. It falls back on infrastructure. Restricting developers and builders to lot sizes would help tremendously.

Angela: Is it outside of the comp plan? Or does that allow them to do that?

Robert: I think they're putting in for variances.

Mary: The comp plan establishes density. Developments are coming in, getting approved, they have to meet requirements.

Angela: I'm not getting the disconnect. If the comp plan allows it, the problem is the plan needs to be revisited.

Speaker: We're not writing it. Others with higher education write it.

Mike: There's a lot of interpretation by us. We don't understand how it fully manages the growth. We need better education on the comp plan for transparency.

Angela: I found it interesting that in your weaknesses, the way you worded them turned them into opportunities. And in opportunities, they're worded almost as weaknesses. I'm trying to understand from an opportunities perspective, because overdevelopment is the #1 issue from all of the data. We must figure out if the issue is the comp plan giving variances or they're able to do it outside of the parameters the County requires so we can address in strategic plan.

John: Impact fees. A new subdivision will stress our infrastructure. We have the lowest impact fees around. They need to pay for the infrastructure. That's our opportunity. We need to charge them more to help us build roads and wastewater treatment plants.

Angela: When the developments go in, is there a public benefit associated with the development?

Mike: Until they put the gate up. The pool.

John: To us? No. None.

Speaker: That could be an opportunity.

Angela: Again, we must figure out real issues to determine opportunities. If the opportunity is to streamline development, is that through the comp plan, decisions being made, or putting in new regulations that require a public benefit?

Mary: It's a bunch of those things. Growth management through the comp plan, then we must implement land development regulations. Those predicate what the developments look like.

Angela: I'll have to look at when the comp plan update is up.

Mary: It's due.

Team 2

Mike: We expanded on more fiscal responsibility for developers. That's not just their development. It's the turn lanes, etc. That may be a deterrent to growth, making them manage their own growth. And balancing quality of life, so maybe more flexible schedules like four 10-hour days. Some people prefer weekends because their spouse may be in the service industry. We can equalize and everyone can benefit. Not just employees, but those they're serving.

Team 3

John: Staff retention due to all the development coming in. That's huge. That must go with the internal passing of the baton. We have a good opportunity to do that. We'll have higher salaries, which will help.

Team 4

Art: Lack of training or cross training within departments and across departments. Everyone has their own niche, doing the same thing day after day. We just had 35 years of experience leave our little department. This happens in all departments. It's trying to keep up with changes, demands, people leaving and retiring, and people getting promoted. Also, communication regarding personnel policies needs to be enhanced.

Angela: Is someone here from HR?

Mike: No.

Angela: Dr. Daly and I were talking about your last comp study for the County.

Egle: This County seems like they're reacting to growth, rather than proactively looking at what growth will be. There was no discussion about personnel; hiring how many people we need to service all that growth. We're proud that we are bare minimal on employees, but we're not planning for the growth. It should be percentagewise in both places.

John Daly: Retention rate and turnover may influence things.

Mike: They're all casualties of the growth. People will go elsewhere to get paid more. It's an exponential problem.

John Daly: Training people to take on additional responsibilities.

Angela: You're not alone. We see it in a lot of small cities. People get training and leave to go somewhere else. Local government is really incenstual, especially in the last three to five years.

Andrea: I was just with Pinellas County, and they're building a succession planning program. They have 180 in DROP right now, so they're garnering that brain trust now.

Mike: 170 of them will say I wish you had someone standing behind me.

Andrea: We're working on that too.

Mike: I see people move into different neighborhoods, and succession of people who built the neighborhood. Now they're like this place is great, but they implement things from their previous neighborhood. You let one rat in the door, now there's five. Not the people, but the rules.

Top Opportunities
• **Staff retention, salaries, hiring, staff development – 17%** • **Flexible work schedule, in order to improve work/life balance – 17%** • **Pass the whole cent sales tax next time, to make improvements – 17%** • Lack of training/cross-training within department, but across departments. – 14% • Limit access to developers – 14% • More fiscal responsibility on developers – 14% • Communication regarding personnel policies needs enhancement – 7%

These are the remaining opportunities brainstormed by the teams:
- Increase of impact fees
- Focus on preserving our natural resources.

Threats

Andrea: We're on the home stretch with threats.

Team 1

Amy: Drugs. Increase police action. We must figure out what's going on with the drugs and stop all of that. Homelessness and mental health -- it all goes together.

Team 2

Mike: Be competitive with neighboring counties for desirable employees. Also development and management of the people, but if you have this much growth in such a rural area, you have to manage the wildlife displacement. That means increasing amenities like rescues. When I was in animal services, we would catch foxes because of rabies. That went away. We used to be proactive. We have more people pushing up on the nature.

Angela: This is a great example of public benefit. An external threat is new developments are coming in. You can't really control that. The public benefit would be what is the developer's strategy to mitigate displacement of wildlife.

Mike: It's tangible to a fiscal responsibility to it too.

Angela: The threat is new development is displacing wildlife and a mitigation strategy could be the public benefit.

Team 3

John: We mirror what others say. Population growth is the biggest damage to infrastructure. That goes to everything we've talked about all day. And damage to natural resources. We have to slow it down.

Team 4

Art: Funding. Taxation reluctance. If we rely on infrastructure with new people coming in, let's go with a half-cent sales tax for current residents. It's not that much. Hometown atmosphere is our other one. You can't have your cake and eat it too. We have to take more responsibility as a community to keep it that way. We fear loss of current natural resources, agriculturally and the hometown feeling.

Andrea: I'm seeing a lot of alignment among teams.

Angela: Also, it's interesting that on threats they have a lot of fear. Fear f is an external threat. We saw that in the resident survey and the first community forum.

Top Threats
• **Fear of rapid growth; overpopulation/congestion – 19%** • **Fear of the loss of current natural/agricultural ambiance-hometown feel – 17%** • **Damage to our natural resources – 17%** • Funding (taxation reluctance) – 14% • Wildlife displacement vs. development – 11% • Population growth will hamper county infrastructure – 8% • Increase police action with drugs – 8% • Competition with neighboring counties for desirable/high paying employers – 6%

These are the remaining threats brainstormed by the teams:
- Imbalance of residential vs. corporate and commercial development
- Increasing homeless population
- Lack of communication with both the public and the employees

One Word to Describe Today

Andrea: This has been so helpful. We're in the final stretch here. One final poll. Please give us one word to describe today. The more a word is mentioned, the larger it will get.

These are good. Brainstorm, responsiveness, engagement. That's a big one. Thought provoking. Any reflections on your time today?

Mary: I've enjoyed working for Hernando County a lot. Hard workers who produce, but the best time is when employees can collaborate together on a strategic plan, customer service strategies, and ways to deal with office issues. Collaboration cross section produces good things.

Visual Illustration

Andrea: Now I'd like to ask Jonathan to share what he's captured visually.
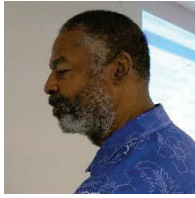
Jonathan: Keeping the rats out. I won't explain that. It's just here. You know if you were in the room. Not that we have a rat problem. *(laughter)*

The idea is the word balance. I have scales on both sides. Quality of life with family in the middle represents small town feel, family-oriented community, and welcoming. Maintaining that, we have scales that represent you, the employees, the people that take care of Hernando County. Employee morale. Balancing those things. The small categories around that are policy, salary, manpower, and cross training. Then we have the balance of preserving nature and resources with growing development. You must balance those to maintain quality of life and be attractive to future residents, while taking care of the residents already here.

Wrap-Up & Next Steps for Success

Andrea: When you go on the website, look for Jonathan's full-color image front and center on the RTR. We are so grateful for you today, helping us advance in our Phase 1 efforts.

Wrap-Up & Next Steps

➢ How will you stay engaged in the Strategic Planning Process?

engagehernando.com/strategicplan

PROJECT PLAN & Information Collected to Date

What are we doing and why?

What is your role in the process?

What are those key dates for your engagement?

Phase One

1.1	Kick Off and Work Plan Refinement	October 28, 2024
1.2	Commission: Strategic Alignment Workshop & Setting Expectations	November 21, 2024
1.3	Communications Outreach	Ongoing
1.4	Citizen Engagement Session	December 18, 2024
1.5	Individual/Group Stakeholder Interviews	January 2025
1.6	Resident Feedback Survey	January 2025
1.7	Community Focus Group Forum I (2 hours)	February 4, 2025
1.8	Employee Survey	February 2025
1.9	Employee Focus Group Forum (3 hours)	March 27, 2025
1.10	Community Focus Group Forum II (2 hours)	April 4, 2025
1.11	Commission Presentation: Review info-to-date and Next Steps	May 2025

Phase Two

2.1	Leadership Forum I (4 hours) off-site	June 2025
2.2	County Administrator & Executive Leadership Planning Meeting	June 2025
2.3	Leadership Forum II (3 hours) off-site	July 2025
2.4	County Administrator & Executive Leadership Planning Meeting	August 2025
2.5	Final Report Internal Review	September 2025
2.6	Final Report to Commission Workshop	October 2025

Phase Three:

3.1	Strategies for supporting the implementation plan	November 2025
3.2	Implementation plan facilitation	November 2026

Attendees

Hernando County Employee Focus Group: March 27, 2025: Sign-In Sheet

Full Name Last-First-Middle	Department Title	Signature
ANDERSEN BROWN, JANE N	BUILDING DIVISION	*Jane Brown*
BALDWIN , AMY B	OFFICE OF PUBLIC INFORMATION	*Amy Baldwin*
BRANNON , MADISON PAIGE	AIRPORT OPERATIONS	*signature*
BROWN, LINDSEY PAIGE	PURCHASING AND CONTRACTS	*signature*
BROWN, SUSAN GAY	DPW-ADMINISTRATION	
BURRIS, VELVET DAWN	HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES	
CAROLLO JR, SEBASTIAN	HC CONSOLIDATED EMS	
ELWIN, MARY R	TRANSPORTATION DIV (MPO)	*Mary R Elwin*
GRAHAM, MATTHEW	HC CONSOLIDATED EMS	
GROCHOLSKI , PENNY SUE	HCUD ADMINISTRATION	*Penny Grocholski*
GRZYB , ARTHUR R	PLANNING	*Arthur Grzyb*
HAGOPIAN , EGLE	LIBRARY SERVICES	*Egle Hagopian*
HAMILTON , MAEGAN ELIZABETH	WASTE MGMT LANDFILL OPER	
LATWINAS, MARK E	ROAD MAINTENANCE DIVISION	
LUDINGTON, COLLEEN T	LIBRARY SERVICES	*Colleen Ludington*
MONSEY , CLIFTON ROMAINE	FACILITIES MAINTENANCE	
NELSON, SCOTT E	COUNTY ENGINEER'S OFFICE	*Scott E. Nelson*
NORMAN, DUANE	HC CONSOLIDATED FIRE	
PEARSON, SHARON GAIL	OFFICE OF PUBLIC INFORMATION	*Sharon Pearson*
POPPKE, KIMBERLY	BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT	*signature*
RIEF, STEVEN W	PARKS & FACILITIES ADMIN	
RODRIGUEZ, DIANE	BUILDING DIVISION	*Diane Rodriguez*
ROLLINS, MICHAEL R	HCUD WASTEWATER OPERATION	
RUSSO, RONALD P	BUILDING DIVISION	
SAUER, MICHAEL WAYNE	AIRPORT OPERATIONS	
SCHANTL, JOHN DAVID	HCUD ENGINEERING	*John Schantl*
SCHWAN, LANCE	DPW-TRAFFIC DIVISION	
SHERMAN, PATRICK WAYNE	FACILITIES MAINTENANCE	
SMITH, ASHLEIGH NICOLE	HUMAN RESOURCES	
SMITH, DONNA L	BUILDING DIVISION	*Donna Smith*
STEELE, MICHAEL	CODE ENFORCEMENT	
SURETTE, MARTINA C	LIBRARY SERVICES	*Martina Surette*
THOMAS, ERIN LEIGH HAYS	EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT	
TUBOLINO III, SAMUEL F	PARKS & FACILITIES ADMIN	
WERTS III, ROBERT GEORGE	VETERAN SERVICES	*signature*
WRIGHT, ROBERT ANTHONY	ROAD MAINTENANCE DIVISION	*signature*

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2025 Hernando County Citizen Survey

March 2025

Prepared for:
Hernando County

Prepared by:
Florida Institute of Government
University of South Florida

Table of Contents

Introduction

The 2025 Hernando County Citizen Survey was conducted as part of the county's strategic planning process in order to gather feedback from residents on a range of issues affecting the community. This survey provides insights into how residents perceive the quality of life in the county, their satisfaction with public services, and their thoughts on the county's future direction. In an era of rapid growth and development, it is crucial to understand the concerns and priorities of the residents to help guide decision-making and ensure that future growth aligns with the needs and expectations of the community.

As Hernando County continues to experience growth and plan for the future, the survey results serve as an important tool for understanding the strengths of the community, identifying areas for improvement, and ensuring that public services and policies are responsive to the needs of all residents. This report presents the findings from the survey and offers a comprehensive analysis of the data, highlighting key themes and areas of concern that will inform the county's ongoing efforts to enhance the quality of life for its residents.

Data and Methods

The 2025 Hernando County Citizen Survey aimed to gather insights into residents' perceptions of their community, satisfaction with local services, and priorities for the future. Respondents were recruited through various channels, including local media, community events, and online platforms, aiming to reach a diverse cross-section of the population. A total of 959 completed responses were collected during the survey period. To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the community, the survey incorporated both quantitative and qualitative questions, allowing for statistical analysis and thematic insights. Responses were analyzed using traditional statistical analysis techniques, as well as with the assistance of a generative AI platform (Chat GPT 4.0, *OpenAI*), particularly to conduct thematic content analysis of open-ended survey responses. The data collected was anonymized to protect respondent privacy and analyzed to identify trends and areas for potential improvement in county services and initiatives.

Summary of Respondents

The demographic composition of the sample largely mirrors the county's population, though there are some notable differences when compared to U.S. Census data. The respondents were diverse, including a wide range of ages, genders, and income levels, though certain groups were over- or underrepresented. For example, the survey sample had a higher percentage of female respondents (72%) than the county's overall population, where women make up about 51%. Additionally, there

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was a higher representation of seniors (33% aged 65+), while younger adults (18-34 years) were underrepresented compared to census data.

Regarding housing, the survey respondents overwhelmingly lived in single-family homes (88.3%), which aligns with the county's broader housing trends (Table 1). The vast majority of respondents (92.7%) owned their homes, with a smaller portion renting or using other housing arrangements. The income distribution was also skewed towards higher earners, with 30% reporting household incomes above $100,000, which is significantly higher than the county's median household income of $41,098 according to the most recent census data. While this provides valuable insight into the perspectives of higher-income residents, it does limit the generalizability of the findings for lower-income groups (as well as younger residents and renters).

Table 1.
Respondent Characteristics (Housing)

	Frequency	Percentage of Total Respondents
How long have you lived in Hernando County?		
Less than 5 years	138	14.6
5- 10 years	193	20.4
11-20 years	187	19.8
More than 20 Years	428	45.2
What type of home do you live in		
Single Family Home	829	88.3
Townhouse/Condominium	7	0.8
Apartment	7	0.8
Manufactured Housing	87	9.3
Other	9	1.0
Do you own or rent your home?		
Own	868	92.7
Rent	36	3.9
Other	32	3.4

In terms of length of residency, the survey respondents were largely long-term residents, with 70% having lived in Hernando County for more than 10 years. This suggests that the responses may reflect the views of more established residents, potentially overlooking the perspectives of

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newer residents who may have different opinions on issues like community growth and public services. While the sample provides a strong foundation for understanding the opinions of Hernando County residents, it is important to note that the demographics of the survey respondents do not perfectly align with the county's population as per the U.S. Census. The overrepresentation of women, older residents, and higher-income households could influence the survey results and may not fully reflect the diversity of the county's population (Table 2). These differences in the sample may limit the extent to which the survey results can be generalized to the entire county, especially regarding the perspectives of younger adults and low-income residents. Future surveys could improve the representativeness of the sample by targeting underrepresented groups more effectively.

Table 2.
Respondent Characteristics (Personal)

	Frequency	Percentage of Total Respondents
Gender		
Male	256	28.0
Female	659	72.0
Are you of Hispanic origin/descent?		
Yes	34	3.8
No	860	96.2
Which of the following best describes your race?		
African American	10	1.1
Asian/Pacific Islander	9	1.0
Native American/Alask Native	11	1.2
White	826	92.8
Other	34	3.8
Household Income		
Less than $15,000	20	2.3
$15,000 – 29,999	52	6.1
$30,000 – 49,999	103	12.0
$50,000 – 74,999	181	21.1
$75,000 – 99,999	158	18.4
$100,000 – 150,000	205	23.9
More than $150,000	139	16.2

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Key Themes and Takeaways

The 2025 Hernando County Citizen Survey offers valuable insights into residents' opinions on key aspects of life in the county. The survey results reflect both strengths and areas for improvement that will guide future planning and policy decisions. A comprehensive summary of the responses is provide below, but first we provide an overview of the key themes and takeaways that emerged from the survey results:

1. **General Satisfaction:** The majority of residents reported a generally positive view of their quality of life in Hernando County, with 53% rating it as "Good" and 9.4% rating it as "Excellent." However, nearly 30% of respondents rated the quality of life as "Fair" or "Poor," indicating opportunities to improve residents' experience and perceptions of their quality of life in Hernando County.

2. **Traffic and Infrastructure:** A significant concern raised by respondents was traffic congestion, with 46.2% of respondents expressing dissatisfaction with traffic flow. Many respondents indicated that the county's infrastructure, particularly roadways, has not kept pace with growth. The need for road improvements, public transportation, and better traffic management was consistently mentioned.

3. **Public Safety:** While fire/EMS services received high ratings, public safety remains a concern, with 29.2% of respondents indicating dissatisfaction with the overall safety of the community. Issues related to crime, such as drug-related offenses and reckless driving, were frequently raised in the open-ended survey responses, alongside requests for increased law enforcement presence.

4. **Economic Development:** The survey highlighted concerns about economic opportunities in the county, with only 1.2% of respondents rating the county as an "excellent" place to earn a good wage. Many respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of job opportunities and the county's approach to fostering business growth, emphasizing a need for economic development strategies that prioritize job creation.

5. **Growth Management:** Overdevelopment was one of the top concerns for residents, with 57.8% identifying unregulated growth and housing as a major challenge. Many respondents expressed fear that the county's rapid development could lead to overcrowding and a loss of its rural charm. Preservation of green spaces and balancing growth with environmental conservation were also identified as critical priorities.

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6. **Community Services and Amenities:** Satisfaction with amenities such as parks, libraries, and nature preserves was relatively high, but there were concerns about the availability of public services like healthcare, recreational facilities, and affordable housing. Residents called for expanded services, particularly in response to the county's growing population.

7. **Communication and Citizen Engagement:** Respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the county's communication and engagement efforts. While some respondents felt informed about county services, there was a clear demand for improved transparency, better access to information, and more opportunities for citizen participation in government.

These key findings provide a comprehensive overview of the concerns and priorities of Hernando County residents. The survey highlights the need for improvements in infrastructure, public safety, economic development, and communication while emphasizing the importance of preserving the county's rural character and managing growth responsibly.

Survey Results

The subsections that follow provide a detailed summary of responses to the 2025 Hernando County Citizen Survey. The results are organized around specific sections of the survey, including: (1) Quality of Life, (2) Community Amenities, (3) Public Service Delivery, (4) Communication and Citizen Participation in Government, and (5) Strategic Planning/Priorities. Each of these sections presents detailed data points and highlights key findings and analysis drawn from the survey data.

Quality of Life

Respondents attitudes regarding their quality of life questions reflect a general sense of satisfaction, though with some notable areas of concern (Table 3). When asked to rate their overall quality of life in Hernando County, 53% of respondents rated it as "Good," while 9.4% considered it "Excellent." However, 30.9% rated the quality of life as "Fair," and 6.4% gave it a "Poor" rating, suggesting that a significant portion of residents are experiencing some dissatisfaction.

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Table 3.

Table 3.

How would you rate your overall quality of life in Lakeland?

	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent	90	9.4
Good	509	53.3
Fair	295	30.9
Poor	61	6.4

These results were further broken down by key aspects of life in Hernando County, including perceptions of the county as a place to live, raise a family, retire, and work (Table 4). Respondents were generally positive about the county as a place to live, with 49.4% rating it as "Good" and 10.5% rating it as "Excellent." However, when it comes to opportunities for employment, only 1.2% felt the county was an excellent place to earn a good wage, with 45.7% rating it as "Poor"—a clear indication that economic opportunities remain a concern for many residents.

This data suggests that while Hernando County is valued for its residential quality, recreational opportunities, and natural beauty, there are challenges related to economic opportunity and the overall direction of the county's development. The lower satisfaction ratings related to employment and wage opportunities highlight a potential area for future improvement in the county's economic development strategies.

Table 4.

Citizen Perceptions of Hernando County (reported as % of row total)

How would you rate Hernando County in each of the following areas?	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Unsure
As a Place to Live	10.5	49.4	32.1	7.7	0.3
As a Place to Raise a Family	8.9	37.2	34.4	12.8	6.9
As a Place to Retire	11.1	37.5	28.8	16.9	5.8
As a Place for Recreation	8.9	26.8	34.9	27.8	1.7
As a Place to Visit	7.1	30.0	38.1	22.6	2.3
As a Place to Earn a Good Wage	1.2	8.8	33.1	45.7	11.3

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Table 5 reports respondents' satisfaction levels with several key characteristics of Hernando County, ranging from public safety to the flow of traffic. The results reflect a mix of positive and negative sentiments, with certain aspects of life in the county being highly rated, while others show significant room for improvement. The overall reputation of the community received relatively high satisfaction, with 49.2% of respondents indicating they were "Somewhat Satisfied" and 11.3% stating they were "Very Satisfied." However, 29.5% of respondents were "Somewhat Dissatisfied," and 10% were "Very Dissatisfied," indicating that while the majority are content with the county's reputation, there are notable concerns among a significant portion of the population.

The overall cleanliness of the community followed a similar pattern, with 48.9% "Somewhat Satisfied" and 9.2% "Very Satisfied." However, 28.8% of respondents were "Somewhat Dissatisfied," and 13.1% were "Very Dissatisfied." This suggests that cleanliness, while generally acceptable, may not be meeting many residents' expectations, and there may be areas where improvements could be made, particularly in higher-density areas.

Table 5.

Citizen Satisfaction with Key Characteristics of Hernando County (reported as % of row total)

Please rate your satisfaction with the following characteristics of Hernando County:	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
Overall reputation of the community	11.3	49.2	29.5	10.0
Overall cleanliness of the community	9.2	48.9	28.8	13.1
Overall safety of the community	12.6	43.6	29.2	14.7
The flow of traffic and congestion	3.4	19.6	30.9	46.2
The availability of quality, affordable housing	8.6	31.9	26.8	32.7
Access to retail, dining, and entertainment	27.3	47.5	17.8	7.4
Your access to arts and community events.	14.2	47.5	24.9	13.4

When it comes to overall safety, respondents expressed relatively high satisfaction, with 43.6% "Somewhat Satisfied" and 12.6% "Very Satisfied." However, a significant 29.2% were

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"Somewhat Dissatisfied" and 14.7% were "Very Dissatisfied," pointing to concerns about crime and public safety. While most residents appear to feel safe, a substantial portion of the population expresses dissatisfaction and concern.

The flow of traffic and congestion was rated particularly poorly, with 46.2% of respondents indicating they were "Very Dissatisfied" with traffic conditions in Hernando County. Only 3.4% of respondents were "Very Satisfied," and 19.6% were "Somewhat Satisfied." This dissatisfaction aligns with broader concerns about the county's infrastructure not keeping pace with growth. Traffic congestion was one of the most commonly mentioned concerns in the open-ended responses (below), with many residents expressing frustration over the lack of effective traffic management and the condition of major roads.

Regarding the availability of quality, affordable housing, responses were split, with 31.9% of respondents "Somewhat Satisfied," 8.6% "Very Satisfied," and 26.8% "Somewhat Dissatisfied." Lastly, satisfaction with access to retail, dining, and entertainment was relatively positive, with 47.5% of respondents being "Somewhat Satisfied" and 27.3% "Very Satisfied." A smaller portion of respondents (7.4%) were "Very Dissatisfied".

These findings highlight both strengths and areas for improvement in Hernando County. While public safety, cleanliness, and the county's reputation are relatively well-regarded, issues such as traffic congestion, housing affordability, and access to amenities remain pressing concerns. Addressing these challenges will be crucial in maintaining or improving overall resident satisfaction, especially as the county continues to grow and develop.

<center>*****</center>

Respondents were also provided an opportunity to provide open-ended feedback on their quality of life in Hernando County. A significant number of respondents (44.0%) expressed concerns about traffic and infrastructure, citing increasing traffic congestion, poorly maintained roads, and the need for improved traffic management (Table 6). Many residents specifically mentioned the lack of streetlights and public transportation options, as well as dangerous intersections. These concerns align with the quantitative survey results (above), where traffic congestion was a significant source of dissatisfaction.

A notable portion of respondents (22.8%) also focused on community services and amenities, requesting more recreational facilities, parks, libraries, and healthcare services. As the county grows, many residents expressed the need for more community centers, better-maintained parks, and expanded shopping and dining options. The call for enhanced healthcare and educational facilities reflects a broader desire for services that support both the growing population and the county's aging demographic.

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Table 6.

Content Analysis of Open-Ended Responses (Quality of Life)

	Frequency	Percentage
Traffic and Infrastructure • A significant number of respondents expressed concerns about increasing traffic congestion, road conditions, and the county's infrastructure failing to keep up with rapid development. • Issues raised include the need for road widening, better traffic management, more streetlights, improved public transportation, and concerns about dangerous intersections.		44.0%
Community Services and Amenities • Many comments focused on the lack of recreational facilities, parks, libraries, entertainment options, and medical services. • Residents requested more public amenities, such as community centers, better-maintained parks, expanded shopping and dining options, and improved healthcare and educational facilities.		22.8%
Public Safety and Crime • Concerns about increasing crime, the need for more police presence, and the perceived lack of accountability in law enforcement were common themes. • Respondents specifically mentioned reckless driving, drug-related crime, homelessness, and a desire for body cameras on law enforcement officers.		21.1%
Environmental Concerns • Many residents voiced frustration about the loss of green spaces, wildlife displacement, and environmental degradation due to overdevelopment. • Topics included deforestation, water quality concerns, flooding risks, and a desire to preserve the rural and natural character of the county.		19.3%

Government and Taxes	
• Residents criticized local government for rezoning decisions, excessive taxation, and perceived corruption or favoritism toward developers. • Concerns about rising property taxes, the use of impact fees, and the lack of transparency in decision-making were frequently mentioned.	17.2%

Public safety and environmental concerns also emerged as major themes. Approximately 21.1% of respondents expressed concerns about crime, specifically rising crime rates, reckless driving, and homelessness, and called for more law enforcement presence and accountability. Environmental concerns (19.3%) focused on the loss of green spaces, water quality, and flooding risks, with residents urging the preservation of Hernando County's rural character. Additionally, 17.2% of comments critiqued local government decisions related to development, zoning, and taxes, reflecting frustration over perceived influence and the prioritization of developers over residents' needs.

Community Amenities

Residents were generally familiar and satisfied with the amenities offered in Hernando County (Table 7). In terms of familiarity with county amenities, a significant percentage of respondents were familiar with parks (92.8%), libraries (84.2%), and nature preserves (88.6%). Notably, only 24.8% of respondents were "Very Familiar" with the county airport, which indicates room for improvement in public awareness of certain facilities.

Table 7.

Familiarity with County Amenities (reported as % of row total)

How familiar are you with of the following Hernando County amenities?	Very Familiar	Somewhat Familiar	Not Very Familiar	Not at All Familiar
Airport	24.8	41.4	20.6	13.1
Parks	47.5	45.3	6.4	0.8
Nature Preserves	44.7	43.9	9.7	1.7
Libraries	45.1	39.1	12.2	3.7
Arts and Tourism	19.9	47.3	25.6	7.3
Water Quality and Supply	28.1	44.1	20.8	7.0
Public Transportation	14.5	30.8	33.7	21.0

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When asked about their satisfaction with these same county amenities, residents were most satisfied with parks and nature preserves, with 16.7% indicating "Very Satisfied" and 50.8% rating parks as "Somewhat Satisfied" (Table 8). However, satisfaction was notably lower for the county's airport (63.2% "Somewhat Satisfied" and 5.0% "Very Dissatisfied") and public transportation (60.1% "Somewhat Satisfied"). These findings indicate that while residents appreciate the county's natural amenities, there may be a disconnect between expectations and services related to transportation infrastructure and certain public services.

While residents are largely satisfied with amenities such as parks and libraries, the relatively low satisfaction with public transportation and the airport suggests that future investment in transportation infrastructure and accessibility may be needed to meet the expectations of a growing and diverse population. Addressing these concerns could improve the overall quality of life for residents.

Table 8.
Satisfaction with County Amenities (reported as % of row total)

How satisfied are you with of the following Hernando County amenities?	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
Airport	16.9	63.2	15.0	5.0
Parks	16.7	50.8	22.8	9.8
Nature Preserves	26.2	54.0	14.0	5.8
Libraries	31.4	56.8	9.1	2.6
Arts and Tourism	13.6	55.0	22.0	9.3
Water Quality and Supply	14.3	52.6	23.6	9.5
Public Transportation	10.5	60.1	18.9	10.5

Public Service Delivery

The survey results on public service delivery revealed a range of opinions, with residents generally satisfied with emergency services but expressing concerns about other areas of county administration (Table 9). For example, Fire/EMS services received high ratings, with 51.6% of respondents reporting they were "Very Satisfied," and another 31.1% "Somewhat Satisfied." This indicates strong public approval of emergency services in the county.

On the other hand, satisfaction with services like general county administration (31.2% "Very Dissatisfied") and economic development (31.3% "Very Dissatisfied") was notably lower. These results suggest that while core services like Fire/EMS are highly valued, other county services

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may require more attention, particularly in areas related to economic development and general administration. Drawing from the open-ended comments, dissatisfaction expressed in these areas may point to a need for improved transparency, efficiency, and responsiveness from local government entities.

Table 9.
Citizen Satisfaction with County Services (reported as % of row total)

Please indicate your level of satisfaction with the quality of the following services provided by Hernando County:	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Unsure
Fire/EMS Services	51.6	31.1	4.2	2.6	10.4
Emergency Management and Preparedness	30.3	40.5	12.0	9.3	7.9
General County Administration	6.3	25.7	28.9	31.2	8.0
Economic Development	6.0	26.2	27.4	31.3	9.2
Health and Human Services	3.3	17.5	27.2	40.3	11.8

The low satisfaction with economic development services also highlights the importance of addressing concerns about job opportunities, business growth, and overall economic policy in the county. Improvements in these areas could have a substantial impact on overall resident satisfaction and economic wellbeing.

Satisfaction levels for other public services were more mixed, with maintenance of streets and sidewalks receiving the lowest satisfaction scores (Table 10). Only 5.6% of respondents were "Very Satisfied," and 36.9% were "Very Dissatisfied," indicating widespread dissatisfaction with the state of infrastructure. Similarly, trash and recycling services were rated somewhat positively, with 23.3% "Very Satisfied" and 40.7% "Somewhat Satisfied." However, 14.5% of respondents were "Very Dissatisfied," suggesting that while the service is generally functional, there is room for improvement in waste management.

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Table 10.

Citizen Satisfaction with County Services (reported as % of row total)

Please indicate your level of satisfaction with the quality of the following services provided by Hernando County:	**Very Satisfied**	**Somewhat Satisfied**	**Somewhat Dissatisfied**	**Very Dissatisfied**	**Unsure**
Maintenance of Streets and Sidewalks	5.6	28.9	27.6	36.9	1.1
Trash and Recycling	23.3	40.7	19.6	14.5	1.9
Water and Wastewater Utilities	17.7	41.5	15.2	10.1	15.6
Quality of Lakes and Waterways	10.9	40.3	22.6	13.9	12.4
Permitting	3.5	17.4	21.1	40.4	17.7
Code Enforcement	5.1	25.3	22.2	29.7	17.7

For water and wastewater utilities, satisfaction was relatively high, with 17.7% of respondents "Very Satisfied" and 41.5% "Somewhat Satisfied." However, 15.2% were "Somewhat Dissatisfied," and 10.1% were "Very Dissatisfied," indicating some concerns about the quality or accessibility of these services. Quality of lakes and waterways also had a mixed response, with 40.3% of respondents "Somewhat Satisfied" but only 10.9% "Very Satisfied," suggesting that while water quality is a positive aspect for some, there may be some room for improvement in management of the county's water resources. The lowest satisfaction scores in this table were for permitting (40.4% "Very Dissatisfied"), reflecting frustration with the permitting process, which may be seen as slow, complex, or overly bureaucratic.

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Among the survey respondent, 430 reported contacting the county for assistance in the past six months. Table 11 highlights the methods used by residents to contact county staff. The most common method of contact was phone (46.5%), with email (25.2%) and walk-in (18.9%) also being frequently used. This indicates that residents prefer more direct, personal forms of communication when reaching out to county departments. Only a small percentage of respondents used the county

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website (4.8%) or social media (4.6%) for their inquiries, suggesting that while digital channels are available, they are not the primary means through which residents engage with county staff.

Table 11.

Common Methods of Contacting the City

How did you first contact the county for your most recent inquiry?	Frequency	Percentage
Phone	194	46.5
Email	105	25.2
Walk-In	79	18.9
Website	20	4.8
Social Media	19	4.6

Regarding their experiences with county staff, most respondents were satisfied with the professionalism of county employees (Table 12). The majority agreed that county employees were courteous and respectful (42.3% "Strongly Agree," 39.7% "Somewhat Agree"). However, concerns remained about responsiveness, with only 22.1% of respondents "strongly" agreeing that their concerns were addressed in a reasonable time, and 27.7% expressing "strong" disagreement. Additionally, while many felt that county employees were knowledgeable (68.8% agreed), 31.3% of respondents disagreed. This suggests that while county staff are generally viewed positively in terms of demeanor, there are potential opportunities to improve timeliness and the quality of services provided.

Table 12.
Citizen Experiences with County Staff (reported as % of row total)

Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements (as they pertain to your most recent contact with a County official or department):	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
It was easy to contact the appropriate official/department	24.8	41.7	17.6	15.9
My concern was addressed in a reasonable time	22.1	28.9	21.4	27.7
County employees were courteous and respectful	42.3	39.7	10.8	7.2
County employees were knowledgeable	27.9	40.9	19.5	11.8
I was satisfied with my experience	22.2	34.1	21.0	22.7

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Communication and Citizen Participation in Government

The survey results indicate that while there is some satisfaction with county communication efforts, significant gaps remain, particularly in ensuring that residents feel informed and involved in government decision-making (Table 13). When asked about the quality of information available regarding county services, only 13.2% of respondents were "Very Satisfied," while 42.8% were "Somewhat Satisfied." This suggests an opportunity for more effective communication strategies, particularly in keeping residents well-informed about county services and initiatives.

Table 13.
Citizen Satisfaction with County Communication Efforts (reported as % of row total)

Please indicate your level of satisfaction with the quality of the following:	**Very Satisfied**	**Somewhat Satisfied**	**Somewhat Dissatisfied**	**Very Dissatisfied**	**Unsure**
Access to information about County services	13.2	42.8	24.5	10.5	9.0
County efforts to keep citizens informed	9.6	32.4	27.9	25.8	4.2
Opportunities to participate in County government	8.1	29.2	25.5	20.4	16.7
The County's website	9.4	43.8	22.2	10.2	14.3
The County's social media sites	10.1	40.6	20.4	11.0	17.9

In terms of citizen participation, a large portion of respondents were unsatisfied with the opportunities to engage with county government. Only 8.1% of respondents were "Very Satisfied" with opportunities for participation, and 25.5% were "Somewhat Dissatisfied." This highlights a gap in the perceived accessibility of the county government to its citizens, suggesting that efforts to increase civic engagement, such as town hall meetings, surveys, or other participatory platforms, could be beneficial. Table 14 summarizes the most common methods that residents use to stay informed about county issues, services, and events. Facebook and the County Website stood out as the most common methods of information seeking.

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Table 14.

Table 14.

Methods of Staying Informed

Which of the following sources do you use to stay
informed about County issues, services, and events?

	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	772	80.5
County Website	571	59.5
Citizen Organized Community Groups	260	27.1
Elected Officials	195	20.3
Home Owners Association (HOA)	113	11.8
Engage Hernando	53	5.5
Twitter	39	4.1

Strategic Planning/Priorities

To better inform the county's strategic planning efforts, respondents were asked to identify the Hernando County's greatest strengths and weaknesses through a SWOT analysis (Table 15). Key strengths included the county's natural resources (37.3%) and its small-town feel (36.4%), which reflect a shared appreciation for the rural and scenic aspects of the area. These elements were highly valued by residents who see them as integral to the county's identity and desirability as a place to live.

Table 15.

SWOT Analysis

From the list below, what would you consider to be the three greatest strengths
and greatest areas for improvement for Hernando County?

	Frequency	Percentage
Strengths		
Natural Resources	373	38.9
Rural Character and Agricultural Life	364	37.9
Small-Town Feel	275	28.7
Proximity to Major Urban Areas	210	21.9
Access to Gulf Waters for Recreation	208	21.7
Limited Development	154	16.1
Friendly and Welcoming Community	93	9.7
Undeveloped Beaches/Waterfront	92	9.6
Public Safety	69	7.2
Growing Community	63	6.6

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Areas for Improvement

Maintaining the Rural County Characters	514	53.6
Protecting Greenspaces	418	43.6
Balancing Preservation of Natural Resources with Growth	387	40.4
Transportation Infrastructure	188	19.6
Promoting Affordable Housing Growth	139	14.5
Improving/Expanding Access to Mental Health Services	111	11.6
Investing in Workforce Development	94	9.8
Improving/Expanding Access to Medical Services	87	9.1
Expanding Business Support Services	44	4.6

Conversely, the most significant areas for improvement included maintaining the rural character of the county (53.4%) and protecting green spaces (43.7%). These concerns point to challenges posed by rapid development, which residents fear may erode the very qualities they cherish about the county. Another major concern was transportation infrastructure, which was highlighted by 18.7% of respondents as an area in need of improvement. This feedback reflects the ongoing challenge of balancing growth with preservation and infrastructure development.

Collectively, the survey results underscore the need for the county to prioritize sustainable development practices that protect its natural resources while addressing the demands of a growing population. This includes investing in infrastructure that supports growth without compromising the rural charm and environmental integrity that define Hernando County.

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Table 16 provides an analysis of the most frequently mentioned challenges facing Hernando County, as identified by respondents in the open-ended section of the survey. The primary concern, highlighted by 57.8% of respondents, was overdevelopment and housing. Many residents expressed frustration with unregulated growth, excessive residential construction, and the loss of the county's rural character. Concerns about overcrowding and the strain on local resources, including water and public services, were frequently raised. Many respondents feared that the county's rapid development would result in a decline in quality of life, similar to what neighboring counties have experienced.

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Table 16.

Content Analysis of Open-Ended Responses (Most Important Challenges Facing Hernando County)

Frequency	Percentage
Overdevelopment and Housing • The most frequently mentioned challenge was unregulated growth and overdevelopment. • Concerns include excessive residential construction, loss of rural character, overcrowding, and the strain on resources such as water and public services. • Many residents fear Hernando County will become overbuilt like neighboring counties, leading to a decline in quality of life.	57.8%
Traffic and Infrastructure • Many respondents are concerned about increasing traffic congestion and the county's inability to keep up with road infrastructure. • Issues raised include inadequate road expansions, worsening congestion, and a lack of public transportation options. • Several mentioned the need for better traffic management and safety improvements at major intersections.	39.0%
Public Safety and Crime • Crime and public safety concerns are growing alongside population increases. • Residents expressed worries about rising crime rates, reckless driving, drug-related offenses, and a lack of law enforcement resources. • Some mentioned a need for better emergency response and more funding for police and fire departments.	15.1%

Education and Public Services • Rapid population growth is straining schools and public services. • Complaints include overcrowded schools, underfunded education, and teacher shortages. • Some fear that the county is not planning for the necessary expansion of schools and libraries to accommodate growth.	14.4%
Government and Taxes • Many believe local government is prioritizing development over residents' needs. • There is strong criticism of county commissioners and concerns over tax increases without corresponding improvements in services. • Residents expressed frustration over zoning changes, impact fees, and perceived corruption or favoritism toward developers.	11.0%

Traffic and infrastructure was the second most cited challenge (39.0%), with respondents highlighting worsening traffic congestion and the county's inability to keep up with road infrastructure. Issues raised included inadequate road expansion, lack of public transportation, and the need for better traffic management. Some respondents also pointed to the dangers posed by certain intersections, which they felt were unsafe. These concerns about infrastructure align with the dissatisfaction expressed in the quantitative results on traffic congestion.

Other important challenges included public safety and crime (15.1%), education and public services (14.4%), and government and taxes (11.0%). Respondents were particularly concerned about rising crime rates, drug-related offenses, and a lack of law enforcement resources. Education-related concerns focused on overcrowded schools and the underfunding of public education, while frustration with local government decisions, taxes, and perceived favoritism toward developers was another common theme.

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Table 17 shows respondents' satisfaction with the overall direction that Hernando County is taking. The results reveal that a majority of respondents were dissatisfied with the county's current trajectory. Only 2.1% of respondents were "Very Satisfied" with the direction, and 23.8% were "Somewhat Satisfied." In contrast, 39.7% of respondents were "Somewhat Dissatisfied," and 34.4%

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were "Dissatisfied." In the context of the previous findings, these data suggest that many residents are concerned about the county's management and decision-making, with dissatisfaction stemming from issues like rapid development, public safety, and infrastructure inadequacies. The low satisfaction with the county's direction may indicate a need for more community engagement and a reevaluation of current policies to address residents' concerns.

Table 17.

Satisfaction with Direction of the County

How satisfied are you with the overall direction that Hernando County is taking?

	Frequency	Percentage
Very Satisfied	20	2.1
Somewhat Satisfied	225	23.8
Somewhat Dissatisfied	376	39.7
Dissatisfied	325	34.4

In Table 18, respondents were asked about their satisfaction with how Hernando County has balanced growth and preservation of its natural resources. A significant portion of respondents expressed dissatisfaction, with 53.2% rating the balance as "Dissatisfied" and 29.3% as "Somewhat Dissatisfied." Only 15.3% were "Somewhat Satisfied," and 2.1% were "Very Satisfied." These results echo concerns about the county's rapid development and its impact on natural resources. Many residents feel that the preservation of the county's rural and natural character has not been adequately prioritized in the face of growth. The dissatisfaction expressed in this table underscores the need for better planning and policies that balance development with environmental conservation.

Table 18.

Satisfaction with Balance Between Growth and Preservation

How satisfied are you with how the County has balanced recent growth/development with preservation of Hernando County's natural resources?

	Frequency	Percentage
Very Satisfied	20	2.1
Somewhat Satisfied	145	15.3
Somewhat Dissatisfied	277	29.3
Dissatisfied	503	53.2

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Finally, Table 19 asked residents about their support for additional passive recreation along the county's waterfront areas, such as boardwalks, wildlife viewing, kayaking, and trails. The results indicate strong support for such initiatives, with 36.6% of respondents "Strongly Supporting" and 37.1% "Somewhat Supporting" the development of more passive recreational spaces. Only 12.1% "Somewhat Opposed," and 14.2% "Strongly Opposed" the idea. This suggests that many residents value the county's waterfront areas and want to see more opportunities for passive recreation that allow them to enjoy the natural beauty of the county. Based on these responses, expanding recreational spaces along the waterfront could be an important priority for future development.

Table 19.
Waterfront Recreation

Would you support or oppose additional passive recreation along the County's waterfront areas (i.e. boardwalks, wildlife viewing, kayaking, trails)

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Support	346	36.6
Somewhat Support	351	37.1
Somewhat Oppose	114	12.1
Strongly Oppose	134	14.2

Conclusion and Recommendations

The 2025 Hernando County Citizen Survey provides valuable insights into the priorities, concerns, and satisfaction levels of the county's residents. The survey revealed a strong sense of appreciation for Hernando County's natural resources, small-town feel, and overall quality of life, particularly in relation to its parks and recreational areas. However, concerns about traffic congestion, overdevelopment, and the balance between growth and environmental preservation emerged as major issues that could be addressed to ensure that the county's future development aligns with the needs of its residents.

A significant portion of the respondents expressed concern with the direction of the county, with over 70% indicating some level of dissatisfaction. The primary areas of concern were traffic and infrastructure, affordable housing, and public safety. Traffic congestion, in particular, stood out as a top concern, with respondents indicating a need for improved road infrastructure, expanded public transportation options, and better traffic management. Additionally, while the county has experienced substantial growth, residents have expressed concerns about the impact this growth is having on the county's rural and environmental character, with a strong desire for better planning and policies that balance development with the preservation of natural resources.

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Based on the findings outlined above, it's recommended that Hernando County consider the following recommendations:

1. **Address Infrastructure Challenges:** To alleviate growing concerns about traffic congestion, it is crucial to prioritize infrastructure improvements. The county should consider investing in road expansions, better traffic management systems, and explore potential public transportation options. Improved infrastructure will not only enhance residents' daily commutes but also support sustainable development as the county continues to grow.

2. **Focus on Housing Affordability:** Given the concerns about housing affordability, the county might consider policies aimed at increasing the availability of affordable housing. This could include incentivizing the development of affordable housing units, revising zoning regulations, and creating partnerships with private developers to ensure housing options are accessible to a wider range of income levels.

3. **Enhance Public Safety:** While emergency services received high marks, public safety remains a concern for many residents. The county may consider increasing funding for law enforcement, expanding police presence in high-traffic areas, and addressing concerns about drug-related offenses and homelessness. Additionally, increased community policing efforts could foster better relations between residents and law enforcement.

4. **Improve Communication and Citizen Engagement:** The survey results showed a potential gap in communication between the county government and its residents. To improve civic engagement, the county should consider enhancing its communication strategies, particularly through digital platforms like the county website and social media. Additionally, creating more opportunities for public participation, such as town halls and community meetings, will ensure that residents feel their voices are heard and that they have a role in shaping the county's future.

5. **Preserve the Rural Character of the County:** Residents strongly value the rural nature of Hernando County and its natural resources. Based on the collective survey responses, the county should prioritize efforts to protect green spaces, preserve wildlife habitats, and implement sustainable development practices that balance growth with environmental conservation. This may include revising development plans to include green building standards and environmental protections.

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In conclusion, while Hernando County is well-regarded for its natural beauty and small-town charm, significant concerns about growth management, infrastructure, and public services should be addressed to ensure the county remains a desirable place to live for all residents. The recommendations provided are aimed at improving the quality of life for current and future residents, fostering a balanced and sustainable approach to growth, and ensuring that Hernando County continues to thrive in the years to come.

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