



# Strategic Directions and Goals Summary

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE SRPP

The Strategic Regional Policy Plan (SRPP) should serve as a guidebook on coordinated steps to achieve the goals for Northeast Florida included in First Coast Vision<sup>i</sup>. It is a reference guide and data source on most facets of life in the Region and its counties. The Plan is organized around strategic subject areas or elements that are in turn related to the priorities of the State of Florida and the mission of NEFRC.

The SRPP contains policy guidelines only where statute requires them. In other cases, it recommends approaches and supports communities in the strategies they choose to achieve regional goals. It identifies regional goals and the intent of NEFRC to regularly track the progress of the Region in achieving them. It is a tool for communities, Local Government managers and staff, and legislators, but not a mandate. NEFRC focused efforts on creating a Plan for the entire Region. We recommend that it be widely read. We will make our best efforts to ensure that it is understood and to assist communities with its utilization.

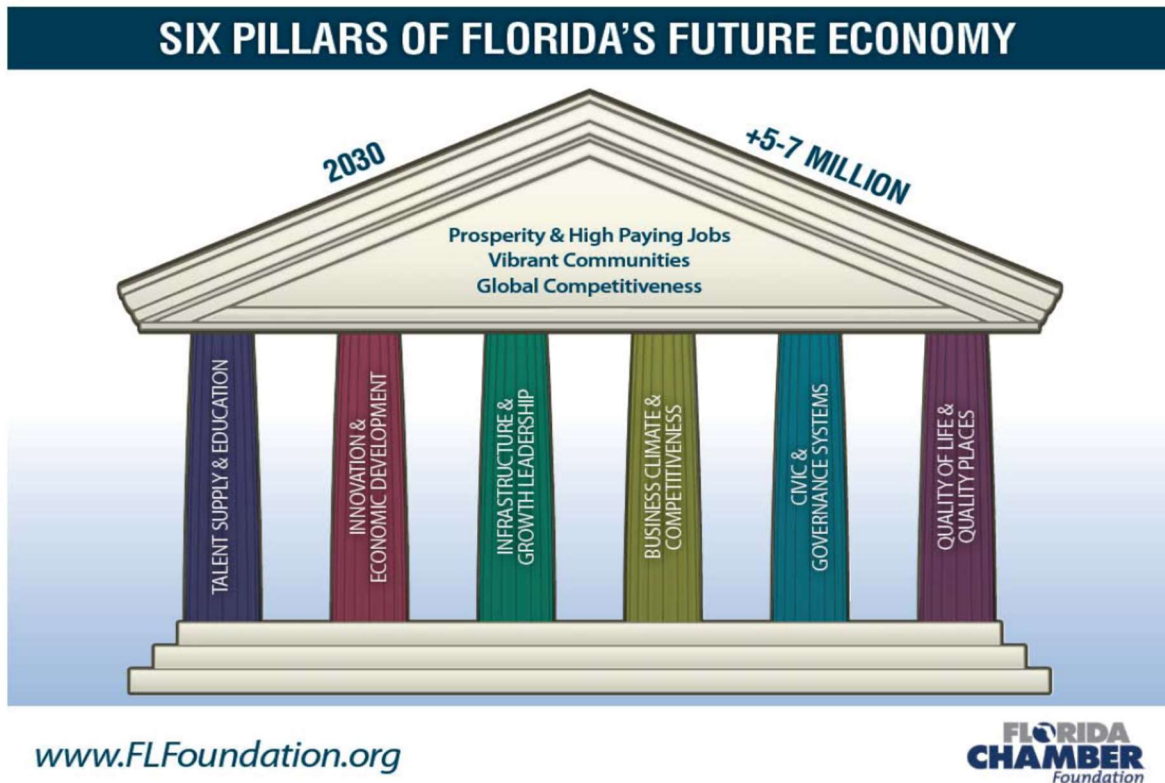
## 2024 ASSESSMENT OF THE SRPP

The SRPP can now be assessed to determine how it has successfully guided Northeast Florida toward achieving the goals included in First Coast Vision for the last five years. It can also be reviewed to determine if it still functions as a reference guide and data source on most facets of life in the Region and its counties. A brief assessment has been added to the strategic subject areas or elements, which are, in turn, related to the Six Pillars priorities of the State of Florida and the mission of NEFRC.

Based on the 2024 Assessment of the SRPP, NEFRC recommends the following updates:

- Update and expand the Cultivation element
- Create a standalone Resilience element, separating it from the Emergency Preparedness and Resiliency element
- Add information on the First Coast Wellbeing Index
- Consider removing the Health element
- Consider removing the Energy element
- Consider removing SRPP alignment with the Florida Chamber Foundation's Six Pillars

## STRATEGIC REGIONAL GOALS



The Strategic Regional Policy Plan is structured as the statute requires, into strategic regional subject areas. In the case of Northeast Florida, there are nine (*five required and four optional*): Communities and Affordable Housing, Economic Development, Emergency Preparedness and Resiliency, Natural Resources of Regional Significance, Regional Transportation, Demographics and Equity, Energy, Health, and Cultivation. All goals and policies in this plan are aligned with the mission of the Northeast Florida Regional Council and with the Six Pillars of Florida's Future Economy (see above). This ensures that the regional plan furthers the State's priorities, and that regional goals are supported by the priorities and abilities of NEFRC.

The following are the high-level regional goals that guide the policies and measures found in each of the strategic regional subject area elements of the SRPP.

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### DEMOGRAPHICS AND EQUITY

**Goal:** Progress toward achieving our goals should have a positive impact on the ability of all of Counties in the Region to prosper and all of the residents in the Region to achieve their personal goals. We will look for residents of modest means to spend less of their incomes on

housing and transportation, and for mobility for all to access jobs and those things that impact quality of life.

### **Pillar: All Six**

**2024 Assessment:** The NEFRC strategy has been to expand its role as a data clearinghouse by gathering and disseminating information helpful to communities in the Region and by maintaining such information when it proves to be helpful to communities in the Region.

The NEFRC continues to expand its role as a regional data clearinghouse by gathering and disseminating information helpful to regional communities and developing and maintaining the First Coast Wellbeing Index (FCWI)<sup>ii</sup>.

In 2021, the Regional Community Institute<sup>iii</sup>, a non-profit corporation of the Regional Council designed to advance and promote the vision of regionalism, established a committee to evaluate the impact of the First Coast Vision. Their findings highlighted that the most significant achievement was the collaboration fostered among community members. However, to sustain this momentum, measurable indicators of success were essential.

The group deliberated on the data necessary to gauge the region's progress. This led to the First Coast Well-Being Index, designed to reflect the diverse policy focus in Northeast Florida. The index incorporates a mix of standard metrics on population and mobility alongside unique data points on fishing and tree planting—elements identified as vital in earlier policy discussions about agriculture and natural resources.

The FCWI was released to the public in 2023 and is meant to be a dynamic tool that continuously evolves as community needs and policy discussions change. It serves as both a benchmark and a guiding framework for the region, ensuring that Northeast Florida remains committed to a collaborative, informed approach to future challenges and opportunities.

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## **COMMUNITIES AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

**Goal:** Each local government is encouraged to take the lessons learned from visioning, the public preference for multiple growth centers, the opportunities and challenges raised by resources of regional significance and the desires of their residents and determine where new growth should go, ideally in locations allowing it to take advantage of existing infrastructure, be mixed use, compact and connected to other centers. These mixed use growth and redevelopment centers are supported in all seven Counties and have the potential to increase transit ridership, reduce car dependency, maintain water and air quality and conserve water. Once these locations are chosen, governments should do all they

can to support quality development there that will appreciate in value and achieve multiple community and economic goals.

**Goal:** A safe, sanitary, efficient and resilient housing supply that provides lifestyle choice (agricultural, rural, suburban, and urban) and affordable options for all income, age and ability groups, equitably placed in vibrant, viable and accessible communities throughout the region.

### **Pillar: Quality of Life and Quality Places, Business Climate and Competitiveness**

**2024 Assessment:** The NEFRC strategy has been to provide support to communities to assist with determining where to encourage growth based on what we have learned with them through visioning efforts. In consultation with local governments and communities, NEFRC will seek funding through Brownfields assessment grants to determine the issues and opportunities presented by sites that may be perceived as having the potential for contamination if they are in areas considered potentially desirable for redevelopment.

Affordable housing has become a primary issue for every jurisdiction in the Region, especially following COVID-19. In response to this regional issue, the NEFRC Board of Directors established an Affordable Housing Committee in 2020, which was convened regularly to identify common problems and potential solutions. At that time, the Affordable Housing Committee created an Affordable Housing Needs Plan. Soon after adopting the Affordable Housing Needs Plan, the State of Florida adopted and enacted the Live Local Act.

The Live Local Act is a comprehensive, statewide, attainable housing strategy designed to increase the availability of affordable housing opportunities for Florida's residents who desire to live within the communities they serve. This framework provides historic recurring funding for housing very-low to moderate-income households. In addition to many new programs, incentives, and opportunities, this legislation focuses Florida's housing strategy on ways to make housing more attainable. As a result of the adoption of the Live Local Act, the Affordable Housing Needs Plan developed by the NEFRC was no longer viable.

The NEFRC continues to seek funding through EPA's Brownfields program. The NEFRC has submitted annual applications for the Brownfield Assessment Grant and narrowly missed out on an FY 24-25 award. Based on comments and feedback from the reviewing agency, the NEFRC intends to submit for a FY 2025 Community-wide Assessment Grant.

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## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**Goal:** Our region is the top destination for opportunity and investments, making it the highest performing economy in the nation.

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**Goal:** View all policy through the lens of the Six Pillars of Florida’s Future Economy. Each of the policies in this plan and all of the actions of the NEFRC will be reviewed based on their relevance to our future, and this includes a broad definition of the assets that drive our regional economy. We will not create a new plan for economic development, but will join the region in support of the goals and policies identified by Elevate Northeast Florida and the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.

**Goal:** Northeast Florida’s economic development strategies, consistent with Federal guidelines, are set with partners and new policy is not set by NEFRC. NEFRC’s goal is to ensure that the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy is a five-year strategy that reflects economic development planning on a regional and county level, and that the region is always positioned to collaborate to maximize funding opportunities.

### Pillar: All Six

**2024 Assessment:** The SRPP includes data on the Region and regional trends in population growth, competitiveness, employment, workforce education levels, and agriculture. NEFRC may add and maintain information that is useful to local governments through its data clearinghouse function.

Additionally, the NEFRC participated in the development of the JAXUSA 2023-2028 Strategic Plan, *The Future is Now*. In spring 2022, JAXUSA Partnership launched its most ambitious regional economic development planning process to date. Leadership from across Northeast Florida’s seven counties (Baker, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Nassau, Putnam, and St. Johns) recognized that for economic development to be successful, it needed to represent the region as a whole. The result of this planning effort was a regional, people-centric economic development strategy.

During the life of the SRPP, NEFRC will reconvene leaders in the Region to update the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. The Economic Develop element will be updated to reflect the 2022-2027 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy<sup>iv</sup>.

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## EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESILIENCY

**Goal:** A resilient and safe region that is prepared for a coordinated and effective response to all hazards in emergencies and is prepared to adapt to change to remain resilient and safe in the long term.

### Pillar: Innovation and Economic Development

**2024 Assessment:** The NEFRC strategy has been to maintain and implement programming in coordination with the Florida Division on Emergency Management (FDEM), the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), the Florida Department of Health (FDOH), and local partner agencies. This includes planning for natural disasters using the Local Mitigation Strategy (LMS) process and managing the Northeast Florida Local Emergency Planning Committee for Hazardous Materials (LEPC), the Region 3 Healthcare Coalition Alliance (HCC), and the Statewide Regional Evacuation Study Program (SRESP).

Resilience of the Built Environment has always been included in the Emergency Preparedness and Resilience element, but significant efforts and achievements have occurred since the last SRPP update in 2019, which only covered sea level rise. The NEFRC has formed Resilient First Coast<sup>v</sup> (RFC), the regional resiliency collaborative for Northeast Florida, which includes Baker, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Nassau, Putnam, and St. Johns counties. It is a formal partnership that works together to improve the region's resilience. It comprises local governments, businesses, non-profit organizations, academia, and federal/ state agencies. A network of resiliency collaboratives exists in Florida and throughout the nation. RFC gathers regularly to assist in creating and developing a regional resiliency action plan, which is currently being rolled out in phases. Secondly, each of the local governments in the region is presently undergoing state-required vulnerability assessments to determine how exposed and sensitive communities are to six identified hazards. Lastly, the region participates in the EPA's Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG) program.

Due to these significant changes in the resilience landscape over the last five years, it is recommended that a standalone Resilience element be created and decoupled from the Emergency Preparedness and Resilience element. This should be guided through collaboration with Resilient First Coast.

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## **ENERGY**

**Goal:** A region that is flexible, innovative and takes full advantage of the diversity of potential energy sources, especially local sources. We will not wait for federal or state guidance or mandates to act if action can benefit the region. We acknowledge that, as a region vulnerable to natural disasters, resiliency and redundancy in energy, both in motor fuel and power, can set us apart from regions that choose not to address these issues that can be of large impact to business and residents.

### **Pillar: Infrastructure and Growth Leadership**

**2024 Assessment:** The NEFRC strategy has been to participate in and support programs such as the North Florida Clean Fuels Coalition, which works with vehicle fleets, fuel



providers, community leaders, and other stakeholders to identify community-driven choices that save energy and promote the use of alternative fuels and advanced vehicle technologies in transportation. In addition, energy production and diversification of energy sources have been the domain of local utility providers, which regularly shift based on market demand and resource costs.

It should be noted that there are objectives without policies in this Energy subject area. This is the case when it is not yet clear what role NEFRC will have in implementing the objective. Additionally, some of the subject matter in this area could be incorporated into a new Resilience element, as recommended in the previous section. As a result, it is recommended that the Energy element be removed from the SRPP and any relevant data, goals, objectives, and resources of regional significance be included in the new Resilience element.

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## HEALTH

**Goal:** The Region supports local and regional efforts to ensure that the region's residents have access to a healthy lifestyle and good health care. Many policies in other elements of the SRPP support the implementation of these objectives. NEFRC supports our partners in seeking improvement in health outcomes throughout the region.

### Pillar: Civic and Governance Systems, Quality of Life and Quality Places

**2024 Assessment:** The NEFRC strategy has been to maintain a board position and to support the programming and initiatives of the Health Planning Council of Northeast Florida (HPC). NEFRC maintains a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that says the NEFRC will leverage initiatives, particularly in the built environment and healthcare interface, data development/maintenance, and public outreach and education.

HPC was a contributing partner with NEFRC in creating the First Coast Well-Being Index, which captures many data sets used to evaluate community health, such as the number of hospital beds and physicians per capita, people with health insurance, and mobility access.

It should be noted that there are objectives with no policies in this subject area. This is the case when it is not yet clear what role NEFRC will have in the implementation of the objective. Additionally, the only data set included in this area is a map showing food deserts, as defined by the US Department of Agriculture.

As a result, it is recommended that the Health element be removed from the SRPP and any relevant data, goals, objectives, and resources of regional significance be included in other subject areas of the SRPP, where possible. NEFRC will maintain the MOU with the HPC.

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## ***NATURAL RESOURCES OF REGIONAL SIGNIFICANCE***

**Goal:** Northeast Florida recognizes that some resources have the potential to impact more than one jurisdiction, and their viability is of concern to the Region. NEFRC promotes the protection of these resources, as contained on the Natural Resources of Regional Significance list.

### **Pillar: Quality of Life and Quality Places**

**2024 Assessment:** The State has mandated identifying Natural Resources of Regional Significance. The NEFRC has also included those resources suggested by Counties in the Region and parks greater than 20 acres identified as Florida Land Management Areas, or in the Florida State Park System.

The NEFRC strategy has been to convene its partners as necessary to consider the long-term viability of natural resources of regional significance and assist them in meeting their goals while ensuring the quality of life for current and future residents of Northeast Florida.

The NEFRC maintains GIS mapping for green infrastructure, such as agricultural lands, floodplains, aquifer recharge areas, recreational lands, silviculture, and wetlands, which will be updated. As part of the update process, the following lists and maps will be reviewed: Waterbodies and Wetlands, Parks and Preserves, Trails, Blueways, Floridan Aquifer, and Recharge Areas.

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## ***REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION***

**Goal:** Create efficient connectivity within the Region, and with state, national, and global economies. Include centers of population and jobs that are well-connected, limit commute times for most residents and provide opportunities for all residents of the region to work if they choose. Northeast Florida makes development of regional employment centers and infrastructure a first priority, politically and fiscally.

**Goal:** In order to promote a diversified and vibrant regional economy, the Region supports an efficient multi-modal transportation framework to move people and goods, and NEFRC and its partners support over time the infrastructure investments needed to make it work. The framework maintains an environment that includes mobility options to move goods and people to support business and industry.

### **Pillar: Innovation and Economic Development**

**2024 Assessment:** The Regional Transportation Commission has ended, and NEFRC has participated in the Regional Transit Working Group. NEFRC will continue to participate and coordinate with other partners at the Florida Department of Transportation, the Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged, the North Florida Transportation Planning Organization, and the River to Sea Transportation Planning Organization.

As this is a required subject area or element of the SRPP, accompanying data will be updated.

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## **REGIONAL CULTIVATION**

**Goal:** Recognize the importance of cultivation in Northeast Florida and be part of the conversation on what approaches are appropriate here and how to successfully implement them.

### **Pillar: Innovation and Economic Development**

**2024 Assessment:** Cultivation was a new subject area added during the 2019 SRPP update. Previous SRPPs failed to recognize that agriculture, fishing, and silviculture support the region's health, safety, economy, and natural environment in a way that merits a free-standing subject area of the Plan. As this was the beginning, it was not yet possible for this subject area to embody a vision for cultivation. Instead, it recognized the importance of cultivation in Northeast Florida and should be updated over time to reflect the appropriate approaches.

It is recommended that this subject area be updated to reflect the guidance from convening cultivation subject matter experts in the region, especially those people and entities that guided the development and adoption of the Cultivation element in 2019.

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**REFERENCES OUTSIDE THE SRPP**

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- i For more about the First Coast Vision, visit <http://www.firstcoastvision.com>
- ii For more about the First Coast Well-Being Index, visit <https://www.nefrc.org/well-being-index>
- iii For more about the Regional Community Institute of Northeast Florida, Inc., visit <https://www.rcinef.org/>
- iv For more about the 2022-2027 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, visit <https://www.nefrc.org/ceds2022>
- v For more about Resilient First Coast, visit <https://resilientfirstcoast.com/>