

# *City of Palatka Vision Plan*







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# Introduction

The City of Palatka contracted with the Northeast Florida Regional Council (NEFRC) to develop a vision to guide future development. To develop the Vision Plan, the NEFRC conducted community public engagement meetings and a visual preference survey from October 2023 - August 2024. The Vision Plan is a narrative of the way residents and leadership envision how the community should look and function over the next 10-20 years. This Vision Plan will help the City of Palatka update the 2045 Comprehensive Plan.



# Vision Statement

Established in 1853, the City of Palatka has a rich history along the scenic St. Johns River. The community's natural beauty attracted early settlement and is one of the many reasons people live in Palatka today.

Palatka has grown beyond its riverfront, and the community has a unique opportunity to decide what it wants to look like in the future. Community pride was a constant theme received from public input. Palatka residents love their city and want to see it improved while maintaining its historic, small-city character. To do so, Palatka should focus on infill development, reducing blight, and increasing affordable housing. The city can add more housing units without changing its character by making it easier to build traditional small-scale multi-family homes – duplexes, tri-plexes, four-plexes, garage apartments, and accessory dwelling units. Large apartment complexes and mixed-use buildings should be limited to major commercial roads.

Palatka's innate community pride manifests in a desire to elevate, preserve, and expand the city's neighborhoods and historical assets. Palatka can focus on infill development by helping to create high-quality public spaces in all neighborhoods, which will encourage redevelopment and reduce blight. Conducting historic property surveys of neighborhoods outside of downtown can help identify neighborhood assets and help build neighborhood identity.

Future generations must embrace local living, working, and recreational opportunities to ensure Palatka's continued prosperity. To achieve this, Palatka can foster infill and redevelopment by improving walkability and bike-ability. Additionally, prioritizing multi-modal transportation infrastructure — such as roads, sidewalks, multi-use paths, and bike trails — will further incentivize infill development. While transit options remain a long-term objective, the City of Palatka can pave the way for future transit by bolstering walkability and interconnectivity.



# PALATKA BY THE NUMBERS

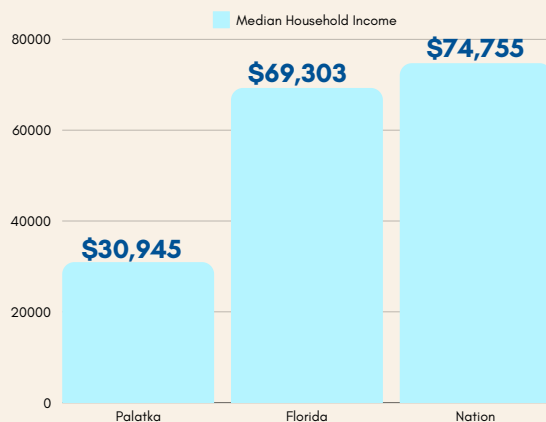
The City of Palatka snapshot data, collected from the U.S. 2020 Census Bureau, provides a high-level look at the community's diverse needs.



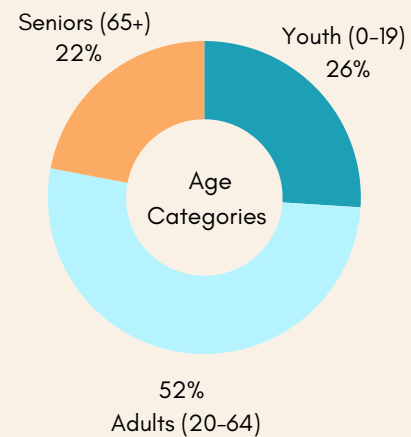
**MEDIAN  
PROPERTY  
VALUE**  
**\$97,800**

**POPULATION**  
**10,446**

**48.7%**  
**OF THE  
POPULATION  
OWNS A HOME**



**INCOME**



**AGE CATEGORIES**



# COMMUNITY ASSETS

As Palatka developed over the past century, services expanded from the downtown central business district to scattered areas across the western part of the city. Palatka has an abundance of community assets, including a hospital and a state college; however, most resources are only accessible via car. When a community's assets are concentrated where people live, work, and play, they become more accessible by other means of transportation, such as by bike or by foot.

1	Airport	1	Library
1	College	10	Parks
4	Community Centers / Public Pools	7	Pharmacies
5	Fire / Emergency Medical Services	1	Post Office
14	Grocery Stores	8	Schools
1	Hospital	3	Sports Complexes

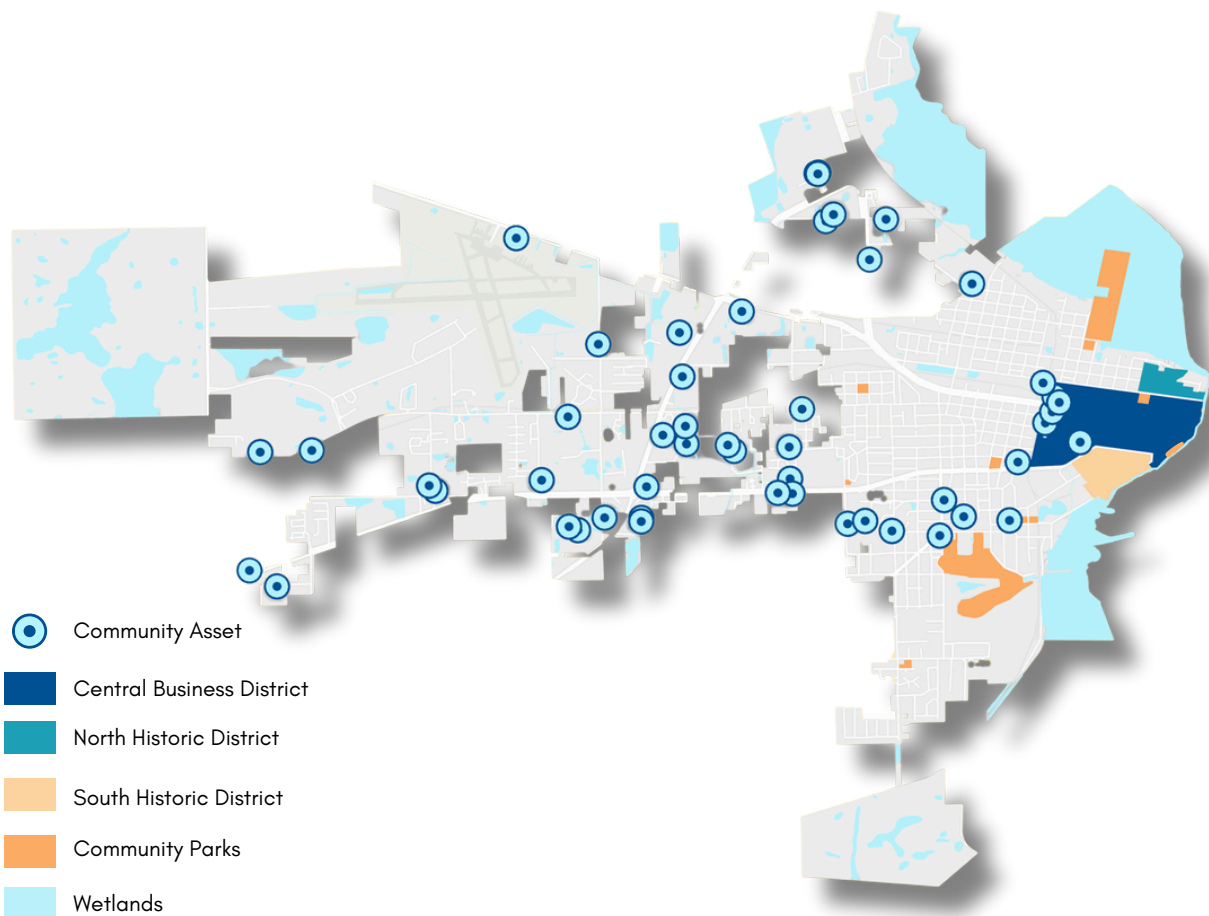
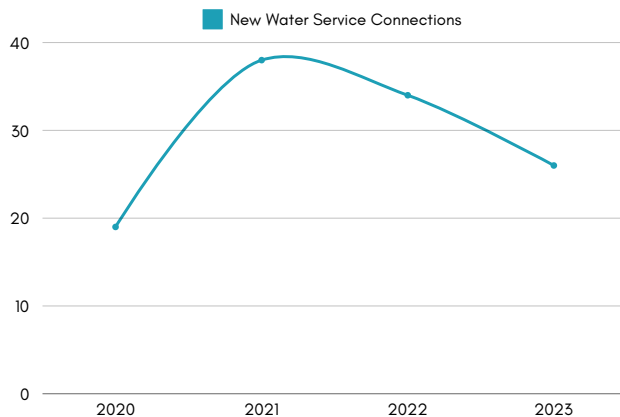


Figure 1: City of Palatka Community Assets. Source: Putnam County Florida GIS and Google.



## NEW WATER CONNECTIONS



One statistic that indicates community growth in a year is the number of new water service connections. This number shows the new connections to residential and commercial properties. From 2020 to 2023, there were 117 new water service connections in Palatka.

Figure 2: New Water Service Connections from 2020 - 2023. Source: City of Palatka.

## HISTORIC PROPERTIES

The Florida Master Site File is created by the Florida Division of Historical Resources to record historic assets such as cemeteries, structures, and districts. Many older, potentially historic properties have never been surveyed.

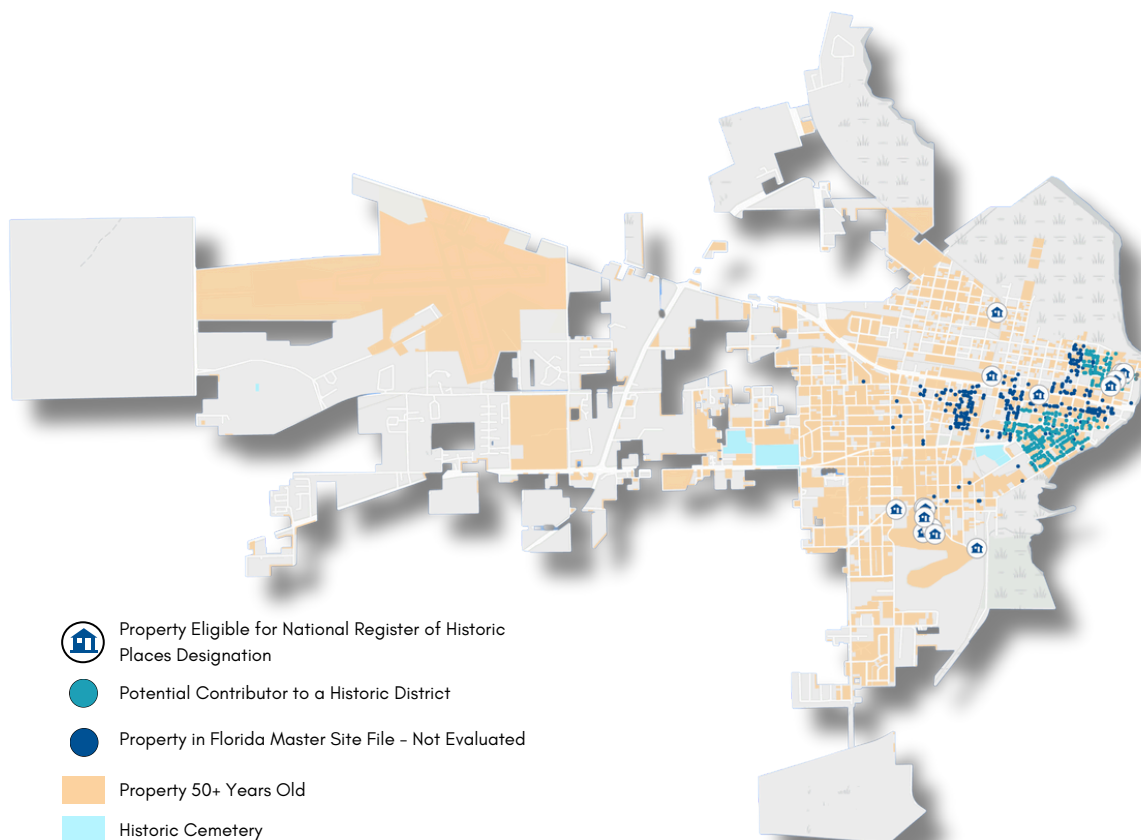


Figure 3: Historic Properties: Surveyed and Unsurveyed. Source: Putnam County Florida GIS and the Florida Division of Historical Resources, Mapped by the University of Florida Geoplan Center.



# Public Engagement



The City of Palatka wanted to maximize community participation and provided multiple engagement opportunities both in person and via online surveys.



# STAKEHOLDER COMMITTEE WORKSHOP



The Stakeholder Committee Workshop was held on January 23, 2024, at Robert H. Jenkins Junior Middle School. An invitation was emailed to approximately 150 stakeholders, and notices were posted on the City's Facebook page. In addition, the Palatka Daily News included an article on the upcoming meeting.

The purpose of the meeting was to identify issues for the development of the subsequent visual preference survey. The attendees were invited to provide input on four different topics – built environment, quality of life, infrastructure, and a Palatka map station.

The Stakeholder Workshop had 55 participants, and a request was made by participants to include the community's youth in the visioning process. The workshop produced themes that were used to develop the visual preference survey.

The themes included:

- Downtown Managed Growth
- Pedestrian and Bike Connectivity
- Public Services
- Housing
- Quality of Life

THE QUESTION ASKED  
AT EACH STATION WAS:  
***WHAT WOULD YOU  
LIKE TO SEE IN YOUR  
COMMUNITY?***



# STAKEHOLDER COMMITTEE WORKSHOP





# COMMUNITY DISCUSSIONS

## *First Community Discussion – February 21, 2024*



### **EVENT DETAILS**

#### **When?**

Wednesday, February 21,  
2024 at 5:30 p.m.

#### **Where?**

Ravine Gardens State Park  
Roy E. Campbell Civic Center,  
1600 Twigg Street, Palatka, FL 32177

**Please bring your smartphone  
to participate electronically**



For more information, contact  
Monica Dominguez at [PalatkaPlan@nefrc.org](mailto:PalatkaPlan@nefrc.org)

The first community discussion occurred on February 21, 2024, at Ravine Gardens State Park. At this meeting, a visual preference survey was administered using the Mentimeter tool, allowing for live and quantifiable feedback on the themes presented.

Participants used their smart devices to provide input, and the results were shown immediately. At the end of the survey, there was a comment section for participants to add further input. This meeting was attended by 25 community members.

A paper survey was also facilitated for those community members who preferred to use this method.





## Second Community Discussion – March 7, 2024



The second meeting occurred on March 7, 2024, at St. Johns River State College, and 20 community members were in attendance. The meeting followed the same format as the previous community discussion. Participants used their smartphones to share their vision for the future of Palatka.

## ONLINE VISUAL PREFERENCE SURVEY

An online Visual Preference Survey was open from February 21, 2024 – May 28, 2024. The online Visual Preference Survey used the same questions that were presented at the community discussions. To follow up on the recommendation to involve youth, a targeted email with the online survey link was sent to students at the Palatka Jr.-Sr. High School (grades 9-12) and the St. Johns River State College. Results from the survey and community input are discussed in the section titled: Community Survey and Public Meetings Results.

A screenshot of a Mentimeter online survey interface. At the top, the Mentimeter logo is displayed. Below it, a question titled 'Design' is shown with two images side-by-side: a modern house and a historic building. The text 'Historic Design' is visible above the images. Below the images, a rating scale is presented with the text 'Please rate from 1 to 5' and a 'Skip' button. The scale has markers for 1, 4, and 5, with 'Like' above 4 and 'Strongly Dislike' below 1. A slider bar is positioned between 1 and 5, with a green circle indicating the current rating. At the bottom, there is a 'Submit' button.



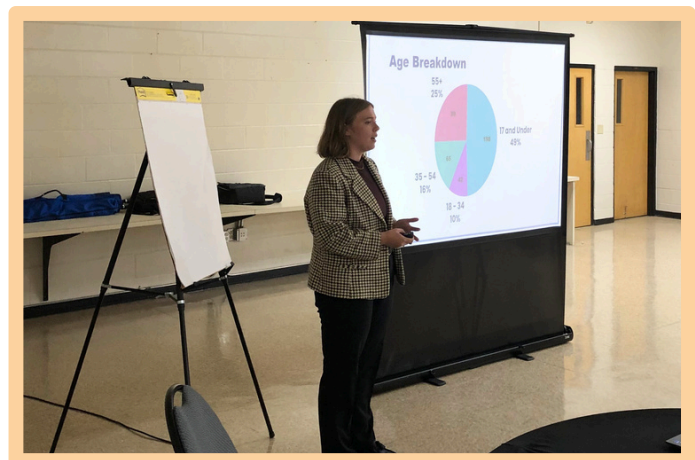
## BLUE CRAB FESTIVAL POP-UP BOOTH

To further engage the community, NEFRC staff set up a pop-up booth at the Blue Crab Festival on May 25, 2024. The festival is a family-friendly event that attracts many visitors due to its music, food, and vendors. Over 125 flyers with the survey link were disseminated, and input was received from approximately 10 people.



## INTERACTIVE COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

The interactive community discussion was held on June 12, 2024, at Jenkins Middle School. The purpose of this meeting was to confirm the draft City of Palatka Vision and the results from the survey. There were 14 people in attendance.





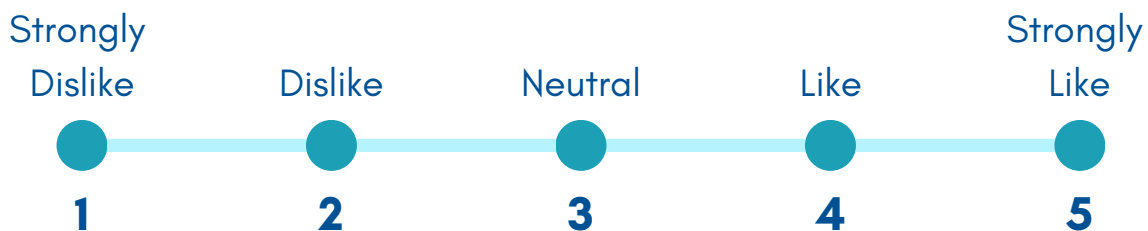
# Community Survey & Public Meeting Results

## METHODOLOGY


Members of the community had three opportunities to take part in the Visual Preference Survey: in-person at the February 21st and March 7th, 2024, meetings or online. To ensure comprehensive community input, the NEFRC used the MentiMeter software to conduct the Visual Preference Survey. MentiMeter is an engaging way to interact with the community because presentations can include survey questions that generate real-time feedback. This software also allows participants to take the same survey online on their own time.

First, the NEFRC posed two demographic questions to gain insight on the survey participants. The survey asked for the participants' age category, then it asked participants to select where they live or work on a map. Next, participants wrote a word or phrase on what they envision the future of Palatka to be like.

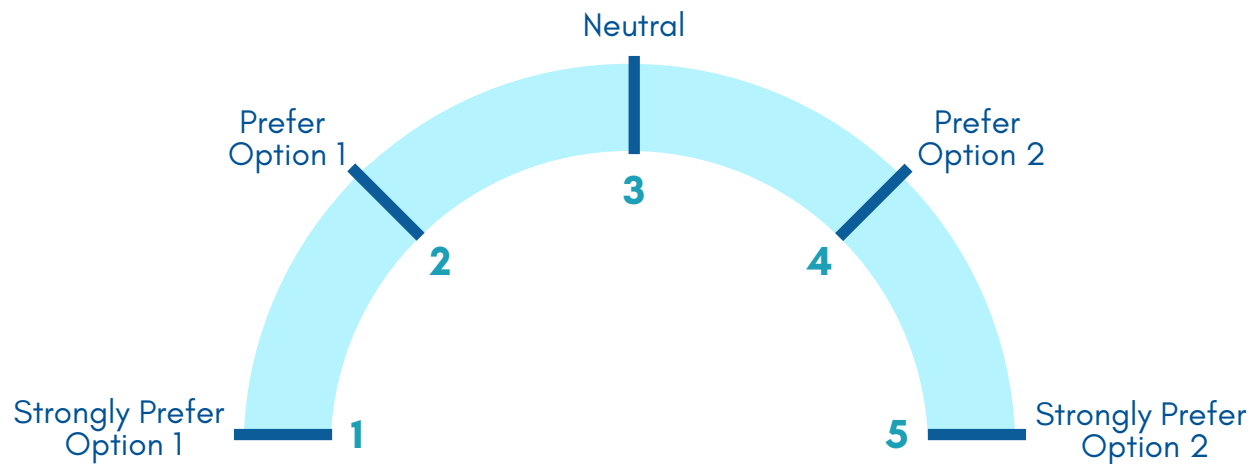
For most questions in the Visual Preference Survey, participants were asked to rank community development options on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating "Strongly Dislike" and 5 indicating "Strongly Like". Any result above a 3 shows a preference for the community development option.







For other questions, community members were asked to choose between two options on a scale from 1 to 5. By selecting a 1 or 2, participants showed a preference for Option 1. Selecting a 4 or 5 indicated a preference for Option 2. By selecting a 3, participants indicated that they felt neutral about the topic, or liked both options.

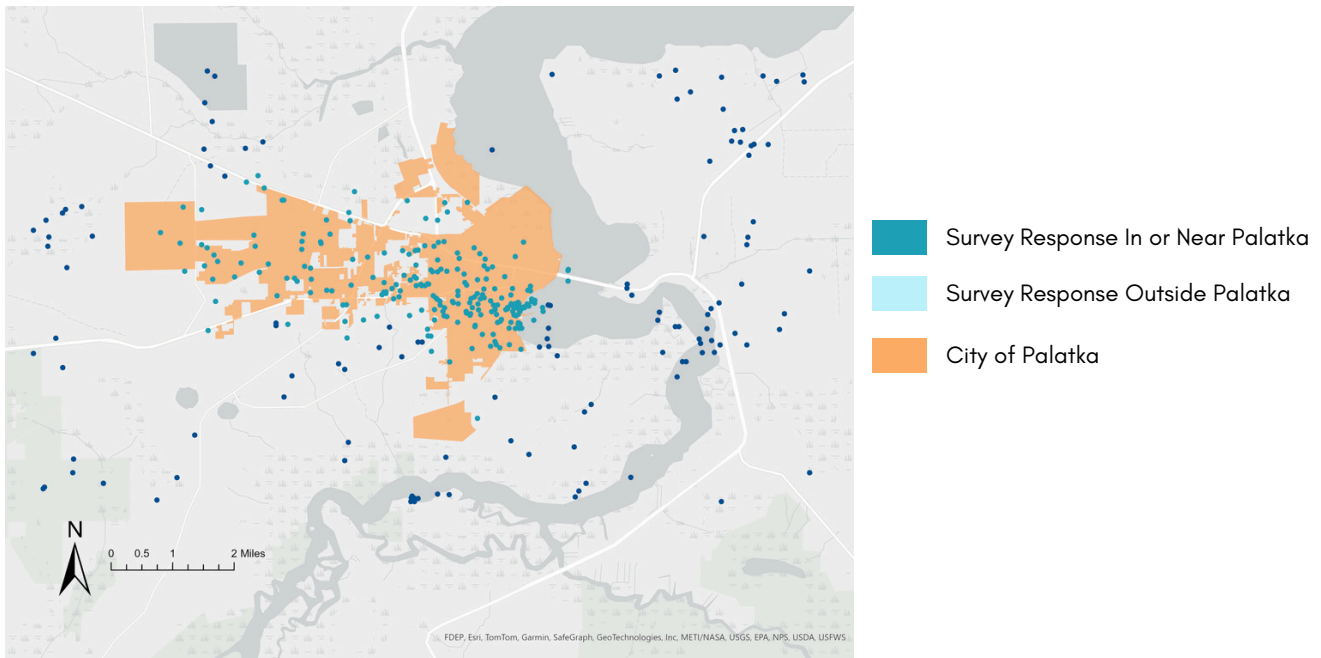
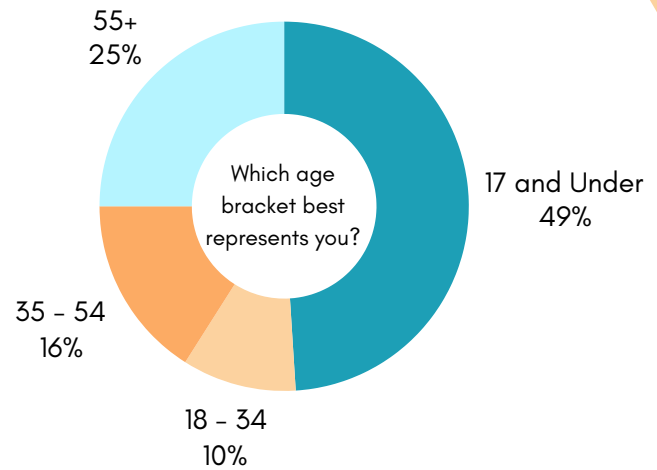


For one question about river access, participants were asked to select between two options. At the end of the survey, participants were given the opportunity to provide additional comments. The additional comments provided more insight into the preferences of the community.



## RESULTS

All survey questions were optional, so the Visual Preference Survey had, on average, 333 responses per question. Due to intentional outreach to the Palatka youth population, approximately half of the survey responses were from people in the “17 and Under” age category, which is a unique result for a planning project. About one-quarter of respondents were in the “55+” age group, while the remaining 26% of respondents were in the “18 – 34” and “35 – 54” age categories.



In the survey, participants were asked: What neighborhood do you live or work in? Most people who took the survey live or work within the City of Palatka; however, all other respondents either live or work nearby. Palatka is the largest city in Putnam County, so residents both within and outside of Palatka have a vested interest in the future of the city.



## Vision Word Cloud

In the Visual Preference Survey, community members wrote one word or phrase that described their vision for the future of Palatka. In the word cloud, larger words and phrases represent more prominent responses while smaller words represent less prominent responses. The results from this vision word cloud indicate that as Palatka moves into the future, the city will need to balance the community's desire for growth while maintaining its historic, small-city character.





## Design

Survey participants showed a strong preference for historic design. Although participants ranked contemporary design at 3.42, historic design had a higher weighted average at 3.85. Survey participants showed an interest in having the City of Palatka put more emphasis on preserving historic structures.

Visual Preference Survey: Design		
Element	Respondents	Weighted Average
Historic Design	339	3.85
Contemporary Design	346	3.42
Rate the Statement: The City of Palatka should put more emphasis on preserving historic structures	346	3.77

**YOUTH ENGAGEMENT**  
**IN THE AGE CATEGORY "17 AND UNDER," PARTICIPANTS RANKED CONTEMPORARY DESIGN AT AN AVERAGE OF 3.87, COMPARED TO HISTORIC DESIGN, WHICH RECEIVED A 3.54. THE YOUTH OF PALATKA ALSO PUT LESS OF AN EMPHASIS ON PRESERVING HISTORIC STRUCTURES, WITH THAT STATEMENT RECEIVING A SCORE OF 3.50.**



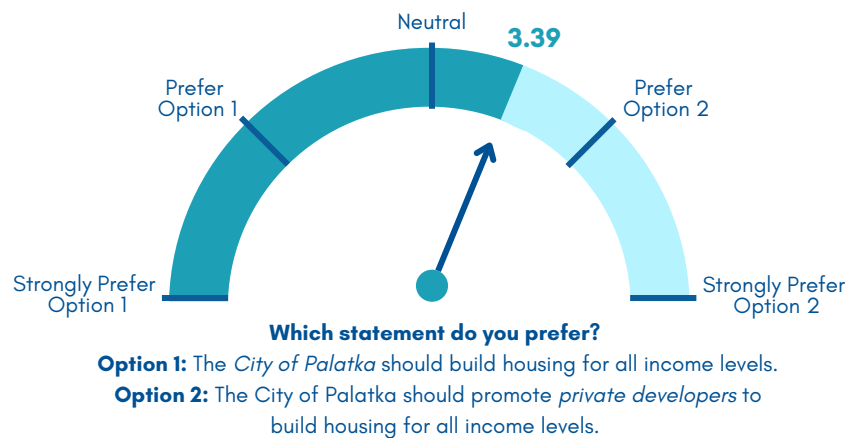


## Affordable Housing

Affordable housing was a theme identified by Palatka residents during public engagement. One of the most common forms of affordable housing is unsubsidized, naturally occurring, affordable housing (NOAH). Types of NOAH can include options such as apartments, manufactured homes, and smaller accessory dwelling units such as garage apartments or in-law suites.

Visual Preference Survey: Affordable Housing		
Element	Respondents	Weighted Average
Garage Apartments, Tiny Homes, & In-Law Suites	339	3.42
Manufactured Homes	344	2.78
Apartments	342	3.31

Survey participants ranked garage apartments, tiny homes, and in-law suites as the preferred affordable housing option, with apartments as a second option. When asked whether the City of Palatka should build more affordable housing for all income levels or whether that responsibility should fall on private developers, respondents slightly prefer that private developers should be responsible.



**TINY HOMES**



**IN-LAW SUITE**



## Density

Density refers to how closely people live together in each area and how many dwelling units are permitted per acre. In the City of Palatka's 2007 Comprehensive Plan, low density is defined as up to 5 dwelling units per acre, medium density is 5 to 10 dwelling units per acre, and high density is 10 to 18 dwelling units per acre. Survey participants generally preferred low density, with an opposition to high density.



**LOW DENSITY**

Visual Preference Survey: Density		
Element	Respondents	Weighted Average
Low Density	340	3.51
Medium Density	339	3.11
High Density	339	2.49



## Community Development



**PASSIVE PARK**



**ACTIVE PARK**



**COMMUNITY CENTER**



**ACTIVE WATERFRONT**

### Visual Preference Survey: Community Development

Element	Respondents	Weighted Average
Passive Parks	337	4.16
Active Parks	337	3.93
Community-Based Resources	335	4.03
Active Waterfront	332	4.08

Improving the community within Palatka may include planning to provide more access to outdoor recreation, increasing the number of community centers, or improving the waterfront along the St. Johns River. Passive parks ranked the highest among the community development elements; however, all other options also ranked highly. These rankings may indicate that community members desire more amenities in their community.



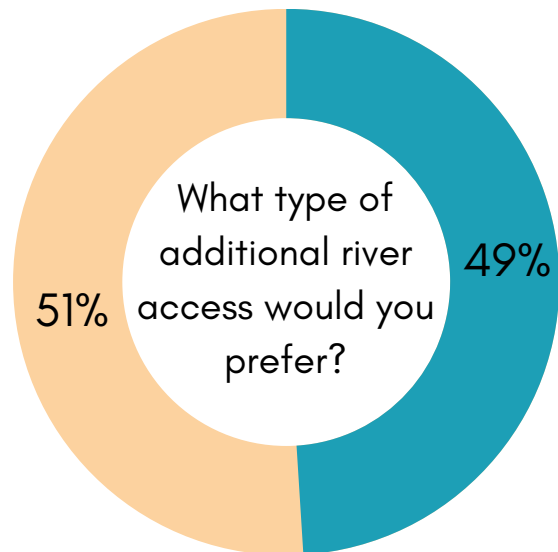
## Community Development

When asked what type of additional access to the St. Johns River participants would prefer, the results were split between non-motorized and motorized river access. Non-motorized river activities include paddle boarding, kayaking, and canoeing, while motorized river activities include boating and jet skiing.

Non-Motorized River Access



Motorized River Access



**MOTORIZED RIVER ACCESS**



**NON-MOTORIZED RIVER ACCESS**

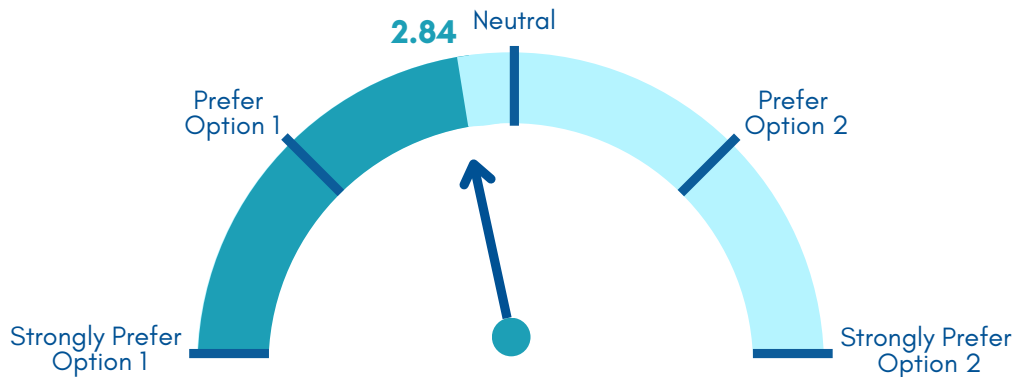
### **YOUTH ENGAGEMENT**

***60% OF YOUTH PARTICIPANTS PREFERRED  
MOTORIZED RIVER ACCESS COMPARED TO  
NON-MOTORIZED RIVER ACCESS.***



## Community Development

When asked to choose between whether respondents would like to see more public art and cultural events, mostly downtown or in neighborhoods across the city, participants had a slight preference for public art and cultural events centered in downtown Palatka. This response echoes themes the NEFRC heard across all community engagement: focusing efforts on developing the downtown.

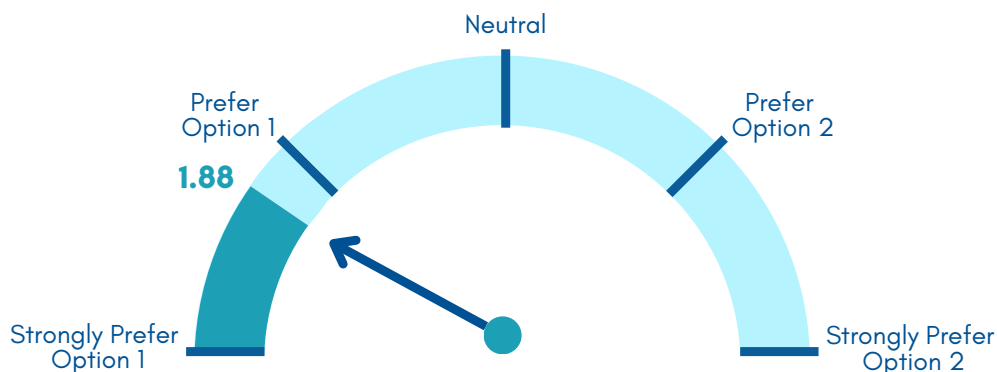


### Which statement do you prefer?

**Option 1:** The City of Palatka should support more public art and cultural events to connect the community centered in *downtown* Palatka.

**Option 2:** The City of Palatka should support public art and cultural events to connect the community in a *variety of neighborhoods* across the city.

Survey participants showed a resounding preference to incentivize commercial activity to promote variety in shopping and employment. Within the written comments, survey participants expressed a desire for adding shopping opportunities at the mall, bringing in major retailers, and attracting a movie theater.



### Which statement do you prefer?

**Option 1:** The City of Palatka should incentivize commercial activity to promote a variety of shopping option and employment opportunities.

**Option 2:** There are enough shopping options and employment opportunities right now.



## Transportation

During the first community meeting, many community members voiced their concerns about walkability, pedestrian safety, and traffic. Survey participants preferred pedestrian and bike-friendly streets compared to roundabouts or multi-use streets. This sentiment was echoed by city residents who said they would like to see sidewalk improvements and walkability downtown. Although roundabouts are a standard method of everyday traffic control, community members generally dislike this option. Street lighting had the highest weighted average in the survey. Street lighting could improve visibility and safety at night.



PEDESTERIAN & BIKE FRIENDLY DESIGN



STREET LIGHTING

Visual Preference Survey: Transportation		
Element	Respondents	Weighted Average
Pedestrian & Bike-Friendly Design	332	3.95
Roundabouts	329	2.63
Multi-Use Street	327	3.01
Street Parking	327	3.39
Street Lighting	326	4.24

## Environment

Visual Preference Survey: Environment		
Element	Respondents	Weighted Average
Bio-Swales	323	3.85
Conserve Wetlands	326	3.95

Throughout the City, there is a strong desire to conserve the natural environment and implement green infrastructure, such as bio-swales. Bio-swales collect storm water runoff and filter the water as it goes into the ground, making this type of infrastructure invaluable for flood mitigation and groundwater recharge.





# Conclusion

The City of Palatka's future is brimming with possibilities. After an extensive public engagement program, residents have painted a vivid picture of what they envision. This collective vision will guide the City as it updates its 2045 Comprehensive Plan. Several key themes emerged from this process:

## **MIXED-USE ZONING:**

Currently limited to downtown, mixed-use zoning should expand citywide. By combining residential, commercial, and other functions, the City of Palatka can enhance efficiency, reduce costs, and foster vibrant communities. When people live, work, and play in the same area, connections flourish, community pride grows, and businesses thrive. Furthermore, it enhances walkability and reduces the number of vehicles on the road and the amount of parking needed.

## **AFFORDABLE HOUSING:**

Overcoming the challenge of large lot requirements in low-density areas, can help to create affordable housing options. Land use rules should allow for gentle increases in density to allow for the development of garage apartments, townhomes, duplexes, and small-scale apartment buildings. These solutions maintain neighborhood character while providing accessible affordable housing options.

## **INFILL DEVELOPMENT:**

Revitalizing existing urban areas through infill development expands potential development sites. Utilizing vacant lots and rehabilitating historic structures for other types of uses contributes to community growth and vibrancy over the long term.

## **PEDESTRIAN-FRIENDLY INFRASTRUCTURE:**

Sidewalks, multi-use paths, and other forms of pedestrian connections that also provide shade should extend beyond Community Redevelopment Area (CRA) borders, promoting walkability and enhancing the quality of life for all residents.

The City of Palatka stands at the threshold of transformation, ready to embrace these visionary changes.