THE CITY OF
St. Augustine

2024 VISION PLAN UPDATE

Northeast Florida Regional Council

The Northeast Florida Regional Council (NEFRC) is a dynamic network of local governance serving seven counties (Baker, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Putnam, Nassau, and St. Johns) and 25 municipalities since 1977. The NEFRC assists municipal and county staff with planning, economic development, emergency preparedness, resiliency, and healthcare coalitions to support local planning and development efforts. The NEFRC is the designated Economic Development District for northeast Florida and covers 4,428 square miles with a population of approximately 1.5 million.
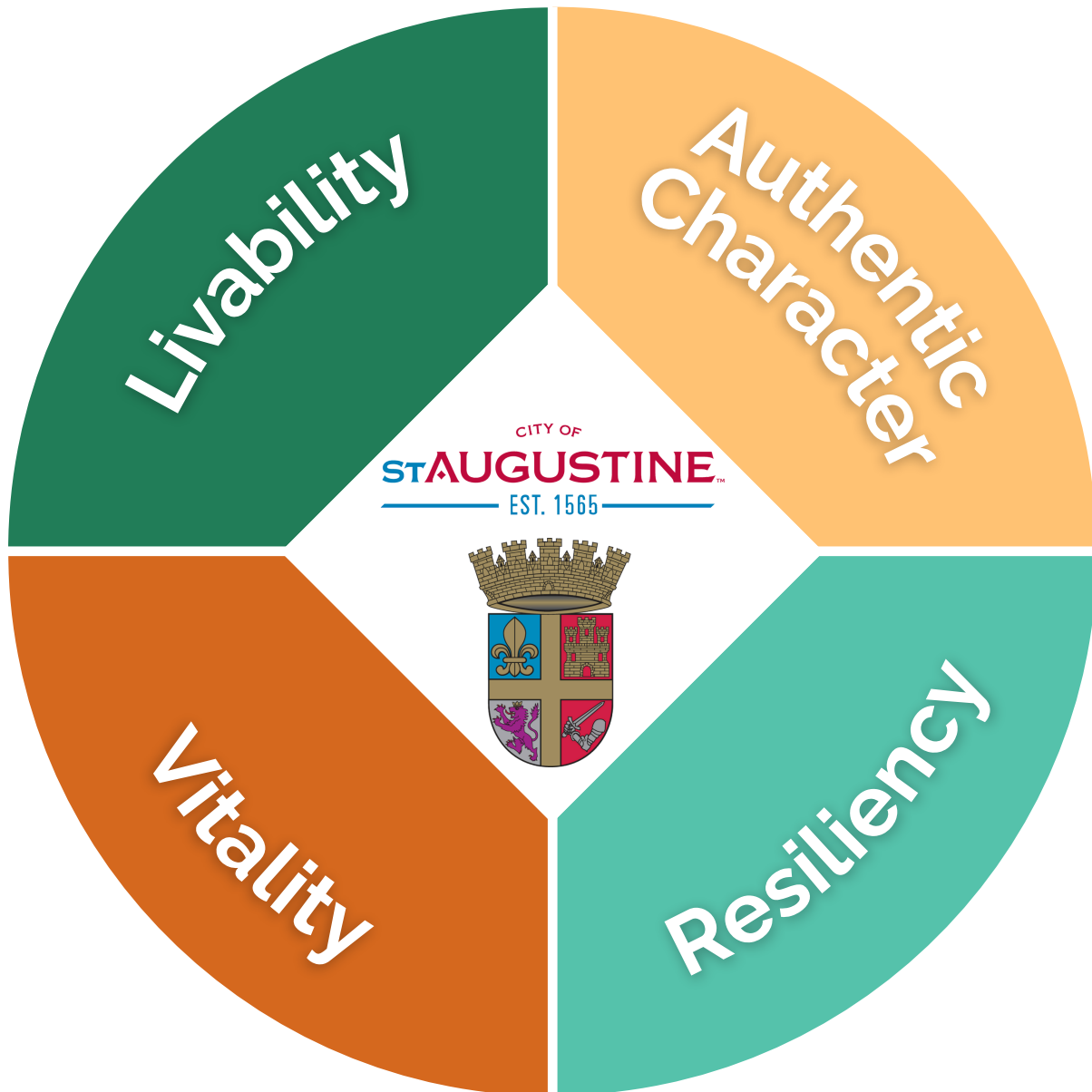
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Vision Statement

St. Augustine will remain a vibrant waterfront city with an authentic character that celebrates its rich history and protects its natural environment. The City will foster a unique community characterized by a healthy economy, diverse population, and a variety of experiences for both residents and visitors, all while ensuring the city remains resilient for generations to come.

2024 Vision Plan Themes

Livability

Authentic Character

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Vitality

Resiliency

Defining the Themes

Throughout the public involvement process, it was clear that the four themes identified in the 2014 visioning process - Livability, Authenticity, Character, and Vitality - were still important priorities for St. Augustine residents.

City staff and officials have made a good-faith effort to move forward on all of the themes and have achieved many of the objectives proposed in 2014; however, many residents who participated in the public involvement process were unaware of the City's efforts. The City needs to explore new methods to communicate its vision and its efforts to move it forward.

Concerns about resiliency were much more pronounced during the public involvement process than 10 years ago, with flooding more common outside storm events and worsening impacts from recent hurricanes. St. Augustine must balance its unique responsibility to protect its irreplaceable historic and architectural heritage with ensuring quality of life for residents throughout its neighborhoods.

The City has become a statewide leader in resiliency planning, but these projects require extensive research and planning to be effective and are very slow and expensive to design and construct. While resiliency is mentioned in the 2014 and Beyond Vision Plan, it seemed clear that resiliency needed to be elevated to one of the central pillars of the new vision.

At the same time, it was difficult to explain the difference between the Authenticity and Character themes during the public outreach events. To many residents, the city's feeling of authenticity is the character they want to maintain. The planning team recommends combining these two themes into one called Authentic Character.

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The Vitality and Livability themes remain major concerns for city residents and require balance. The City has made major strides by developing the Mobility Plan and improving sidewalks and bike lanes. The City has also put major efforts into partnering with the County and other groups to address homelessness issues. But both of these efforts will take years to fully bear fruit. The natural tension in the community due to the large tourism economy necessitates a balance between residents' livability and the community's economic vitality. While tourism drives the economy in areas such as downtown St. Augustine, there are opportunities to elevate other historic areas of the city to spread economic activity more equitably across neighborhoods.

The Need For Balance

A quote from the 2014 and Beyond Vision Plan:

"St. Augustine experiences the natural tension present in communities with an extensive tourism industry, the pressures of large numbers of visitors vs. the daily experience of residential life in such a community. St. Augustine certainly has those tensions.

Tourism undergirds much of our economy, bringing both benefits and costs, and while tourism generates much of the tension mentioned before, we also recognize that the industry brings economic benefits and is the source of the many quality of life features that would not otherwise exist in a similar sized city."

Ten years later, the City still needs to balance the benefits and costs of tourism for the residents and the local economy. Additionally, balancing the needs of all residents and neighborhoods is imperative to creating an equitable environment where everyone has the same opportunities.

The Four Themes

Livability

The City of St. Augustine is a safe and pleasant place to live, where the experiences and services that make life enjoyable and rewarding are accessible. It is a welcoming and compassionate community that embraces diversity in all its senses. With livability as a core theme, St. Augustine will be an even more desirable place to live by offering the full range of opportunities that make a city livable for residents.

Authentic Character

In the City of St. Augustine, the rich layers of history and people create the city's unique character. The city's built scale and architecture support the "small town" feel that draws people worldwide to live in and visit St. Augustine. The city has distinguished itself as an arts and cultural hub, which enriches the social and cultural character of the city. The Vision Plan intends to protect and enhance those features of the city which form St. Augustine's distinctive authentic character.

Vitality

The City of St. Augustine has a thriving economy and culture, creating a vibrant community. By elevating the community's pride, the City can advance projects to beautify itself and encourage new entrepreneurial drivers to support the diverse group of people who call St. Augustine home.

Resiliency

The City of St. Augustine is taking steps to increase its ability to thrive in the face of climate-related shocks and stressors. As a first step, the city will prioritize maintaining and restoring its rich and healthy ecosystem. Over time, the City will implement projects to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate-related changes, ensuring the community's safety for generations to come.
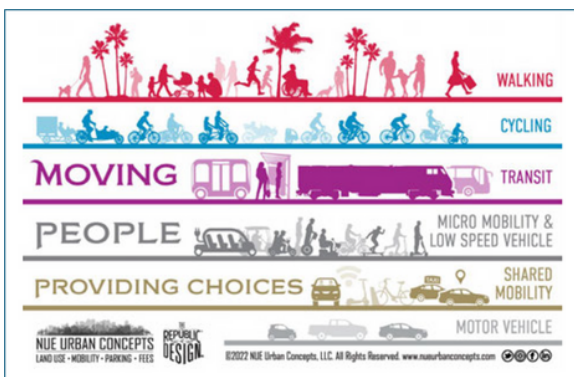
Livability

Highlight of Achievements

Throughout the past 10 years, the City of St. Augustine has focused on policies and resources to enhance livability. A notable first step was adopting the Mobility Plan 2040, hiring a mobility coordinator, and implementing a Mobility Fee. Additionally, the City offers discounted parking across St. Augustine to its residents. The City has also supported the St. Johns County Continuum of Care (CoC) in advocating for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. These initiatives demonstrate a commitment to improving the quality of life for all community members by addressing transportation, housing, and accessibility needs.

Goal

The City of St. Augustine will continue to promote city policies and direct resources to enhance residents' livability and quality of life.

Objectives

Continue Addressing Mobility

To improve mobility, the City of St. Augustine should continue enhancing walkability by maintaining wide, obstacle-free sidewalks and ensuring safe street crossings with well-marked crosswalks and pedestrian signals. Initiatives such as the shuttle service to downtown reduce the number of cars on the road and parking demand, making downtown St. Augustine more accessible and easing traffic congestion.

Improving Safety Across the City

Enhancing crosswalks with clear markings and pedestrian signals ensures safer crossings for everyone, especially in high-traffic areas located in under-resourced communities. Upgrading street lighting in poorly lit areas will help deter crime and increase visibility, making residents feel more secure at night.

Provide Annual Reports on Vision Related Projects

By sharing updates on milestones reached and resources allocated, the City can demonstrate accountability and commitment to its Vision goals. Additionally, these reports play a dual role: They offer an opportunity for residents to provide feedback and engage in the decision-making process and fulfill the City of St. Augustine's mission of creating a collaborative environment where community input is valued.

Collaborate on Solutions for Affordable Housing and Homelessness

By prioritizing the development of affordable housing units for all income levels, the City of St. Augustine can ensure that all residents can access safe and stable living conditions. Collaborating between government agencies, non-profits, and private sector partners is essential to create sustainable and practical solutions.

Address Food Deserts Across the City of St. Augustine

Addressing food deserts in neighborhoods across the city is vital for ensuring all residents have access to nutritious and affordable food. Partnerships with nonprofit and community organizations can also play a crucial role in educating people on healthy eating, cooking and, food distribution.

Authentic Character

Highlight of Achievements

The City of St. Augustine prioritizes distinctive places that honor its unique history, look, and feel. Tools such as the Neighborhood Zoning Workbooks empower neighborhoods to define and protect their community's unique characteristics. Design Standards for Entry Corridors and the Corridor Review Committee ensure that entryways to the city maintain a welcoming, authentic aesthetic.

Goal
The City of St. Augustine will preserve its "small town" feel by redeveloping and preserving the historic character that are consistent with the community's look and atmosphere.

Objectives

Protect Historic Character in Building Designs and Preserve Historic Structures

History is ingrained in the fabric of St. Augustine's built environment, telling the story of how the city has been shaped over the past 450 years. To honor the St. Augustine's authenticity, the City should take steps to preserve and revitalize historic structures in every neighborhood. New or revitalized areas should also follow the look and feel of their respective neighborhoods to uphold the neighborhood's authentic character.

Align City Efforts to Support a "Small Town" Feel Through Smart Growth Practices

St. Augustine residents appreciate the city's "small town" size and scale. To curb urban sprawl and curate development consistent with its neighborhoods, the City should implement smart growth practices, such as improving walkability and increasing residential density in existing neighborhoods.

Continue Strengthening the Uniqueness of Neighborhoods

Every neighborhood in St. Augustine has a unique history. Some date back to the city's founding, while others have a more recent, mid-century history. The City should take steps to celebrate each neighborhood's unique history, culture, and architecture. Consider implementing design standards and overlay districts in commercial corridors to support the distinctive character of all parts of the city.

Promote Culture and the Arts

The residents—their stories, backgrounds, cultures, and traditions—shape St. Augustine's authentic character. The City will make strides to promote its cultural elements to ensure residents enjoy a sense of place and community. The City will also encourage the arts, including providing opportunities to local artists and increasing public art to celebrate the creativity and talent of St. Augustine residents. The City should consider methods to safeguard the unique people, culture, and art that thrive in the historic city environment.

Vitality

Highlight of Achievements

In the 2014 Vision Plan, the Vitality theme covered a number of economic development and environmental issues. The City has progressed in developing a deeper understanding of the tourism industry, which helps drive the local economy and creates unique challenges for residents. The City worked with the Tourist Development Council in 2019 to incorporate tourism-related issues into the Comprehensive Plan. In furtherance of the diversity goals of this theme, St. Augustine's application to be the site of the Florida Museum of Black History was the top-rated choice and was selected as the recommended location by the State Task Force. Achievements related to the environment are highlighted in the Resiliency theme.

Goal
Strengthen the local economy of St. Augustine to provide opportunities for residents and visitors alike through policies and practices that will support the prosperity of all community members.

Objectives

Support Locally Driven Economic Development

The City of St. Augustine should enhance support for small businesses throughout its commercial corridors. By improving accessibility to small businesses in all parts of the city, residents will be encouraged to shop locally instead of traveling outside the city.

Foster a Diverse Business Environment

By embracing diversity in the business community, the City of St. Augustine can help promote inclusive hiring practices and equal opportunities for advancement. Additionally, supporting minority-owned businesses and encouraging diverse partnerships can strengthen the local economy and build a more resilient business community.

Invest in St. Augustine's Workforce and Education

The City of St. Augustine should invest resources in workforce development and education. As the City's population ages, the community must attract and train younger talent to fill the employment gap. Investing in workforce education will ensure that St. Augustine businesses can employ highly trained individuals. The City must consider options such as higher education and skill-based trade opportunities to create a robust, multigenerational workforce

Elevate Community Pride through Coordination with St. Johns County

There is often a difference between the look and feel of neighborhoods and corridors divided by city and county boundaries. The City of St. Augustine should improve the coordination between the City and St. Johns County to create more cohesive neighborhoods along shared corridors. Creating a shared vision for these spaces may elevate community pride by developing a consistent look, making residents feel part of a community, and driving local economic development in corridors outside of downtown St. Augustine.

Promote Beautification Across the City

The City of St. Augustine will promote beautification across the city to improve the quality of life in neighborhoods and attract new business opportunities in commercial areas. The City will also find solutions to address blighted properties that have fallen into disrepair, prioritizing historic properties. Strategies such as tree planting make a city more enjoyable to walk around in and improve residents' perceptions of their neighborhood.

Resiliency

Highlight of Achievements

The City of St. Augustine completed its Sustainability Plan in 2019, marking a significant step towards a more resilient and sustainable future. The City's efforts include comprehensive studies on the city's resiliency and qualifying for state and federal funding for future projects. The City is one of only two local governments in the region to have a Chief Resilience Officer, and it has played a leading role in Resilient First Coast, the regional resiliency collaborative group. Now, the City is beginning to move past the planning stage and into designing and implementing projects that will improve local resiliency. This ongoing commitment highlights the City of St. Augustine's proactive approach to fostering a sustainable and resilient community.

Goal

Enhance the resilience of the City of St. Augustine to ensure the ability of individuals, communities, businesses, and the natural and built environment to survive, adapt, grow, and thrive in the face of climate-related shocks and chronic stressors.

Objectives

● ***Focus on Protecting Historic and Cultural Assets***

The City of St. Augustine will focus resiliency efforts on historic and cultural assets to preserve the unique identity and heritage of St. Augustine. By protecting historic landmarks and cultural sites, the City can ensure that future generations can appreciate and learn from the city's rich history.

● ***Conserve the Natural Environment***

Conserving natural resources and ecosystems helps maintain the environmental health and sustainability of the whole city. These efforts safeguard the city's character and enhance its ability to withstand and recover from various challenges.

● ***Improve Education and Public Outreach on Resiliency, Sustainability, and City Projects***

Education and public outreach are crucial for fostering an informed and engaged community. The City can raise awareness about the importance of resilience and sustainable practices by offering educational opportunities such as workshops, seminars, and informational campaigns. These initiatives can help residents understand how to prepare for and respond to various challenges, from natural disasters to everyday environmental impacts. Engaging the community through educational efforts empowers individuals and strengthens the collective ability to build a more resilient and sustainable city.

● ***Uphold the City of St. Augustine as a Regional Leader in Resiliency***

Upholding St. Augustine as a regional leader in resiliency requires a proactive approach to addressing immediate and long-term challenges. By implementing innovative strategies and best practices, the city can effectively manage risks and enhance its capacity to recover from adverse events. This includes investing in resilient infrastructure, promoting sustainable development, and fostering strong community partnerships. By continuously adapting and improving its resilience strategies, the City of St. Augustine can inspire neighboring communities and set a benchmark for regional resilience.

● ***Support Green Infrastructure***

Supporting green infrastructure, such as tree planting and preservation, is crucial for creating sustainable and resilient urban environments. Green infrastructure investment is a proactive step towards a healthier, more sustainable future for all.

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Appendices

PREPARED BY:
NORTHEAST FLORIDA REGIONAL COUNCIL

NEFRC

IMAGES: CASSIDY TAYLOR PRESENTING AT THE ST. JOHNS COUNTY MAIN LIBRARY

Public Engagement

The City of St. Augustine contracted the Northeast Florida Regional Council (NEFRC) to update the City of St. Augustine 2014 and Beyond Vision Plan. The NEFRC was asked to hold community engagement meetings to create consensus on the vision's themes and develop goals and objectives.
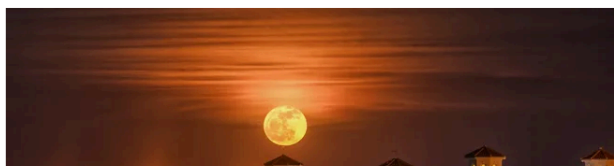
St. Augustine seeks public input on its current 2014 Vision Plan to update the 2025 Plan

The city will hold six workshops in various locations September - November
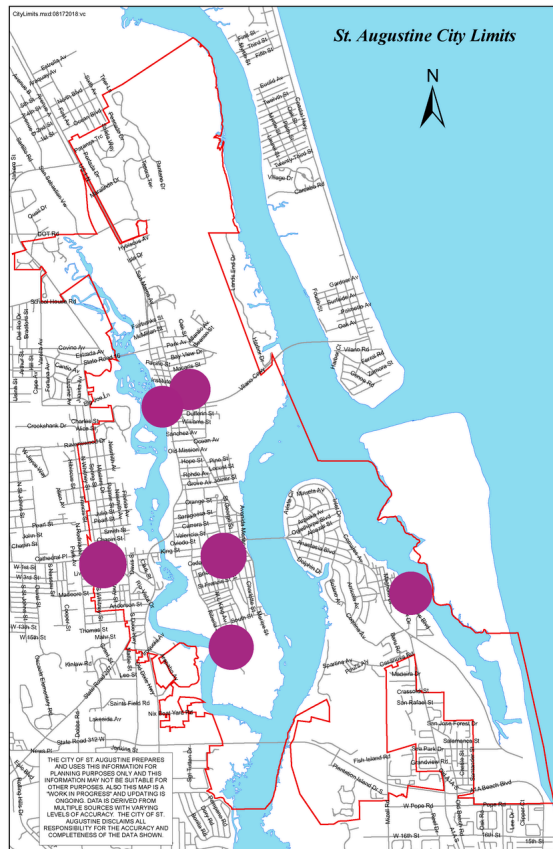

Lucia Viti
St. Augustine Record

Published 6:26 p.m. ET Aug. 29, 2024 | Updated 6:27 p.m. ET Aug. 29, 2024

City of St. Augustine keeps residents' input for 'Vision Plan' update at the forefront

City of St. Augustine keeps residents' input for 'Vision Plan' update at the for…
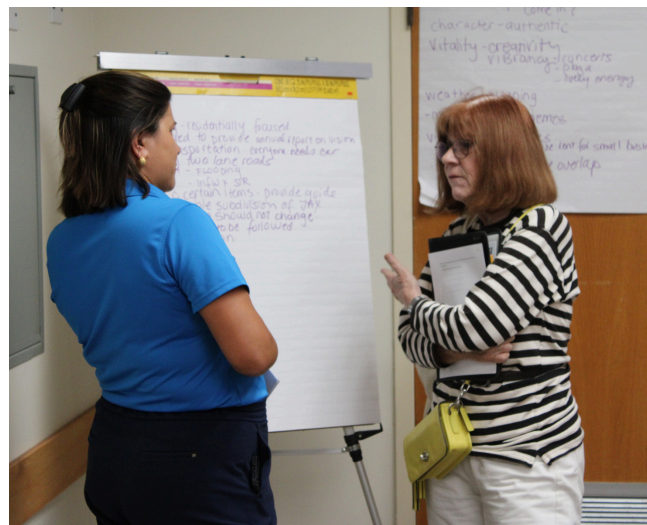6.6K   1

IMAGES: MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE ST. AUGUSTINE VISION PLAN

Several factors were considered to maximize public input. Six public meetings were scheduled, and the locations were carefully considered to ensure diversity of input. The meetings were held throughout the city in the St. Johns County Main Library, St. Augustine Yacht Club, Galimore Center, Waterworks Building, Shiloh Baptist Church, and the Alcazar Room in City Hall. In addition, NEFRC created an email address, staugustinevision@nefrc.org, to send out meeting invitations and gather further input. NEFRC was provided a list of emails from over 700 stakeholders, who were emailed invitations to each meeting.

In parallel, the City of St. Augustine sent out notices via its newsletter, notified media outlets about meetings, created posters and placed them around the city, and administered a survey for eight weeks. This survey gave residents who could not attend in-person meetings an opportunity to participate in the visioning process.

IMAGES: AN EXAMPLE OF A MENTIMETER WORD CLOUD AND PUBLIC INPUT USING A FLIP CHART

The format of the six meetings was standardized. The first part of the presentation set the stage by providing the meeting's objectives, a working definition for the theme(s) explored in the meeting, background on the City of St Augustine 2014 Vision Plan and Beyond, and an update on what the City has done to implement the 2014 Vision. The second part included gathering qualitative and quantitative input using the Mentimeter tool to make interactive polls and word clouds. Mentimeter enhances public engagement by providing immediate feedback on results. NEFRC also provided paper surveys for those who preferred to write their answers down. In the third part of the meeting, the public could offer direct input by approaching a flip chart staffed by a NEFRC staff member, who captured their comments and observations.

IMAGES: AN EXAMPLE OF MENTIMETER QUESTION AND RESULTS GATHERED DURING PUBLIC MEETINGS