



2019-2020

ANNUAL REPORT

Baker, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Nassau, Putnam and St. Johns Counties

Bringing Communities Together

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

This past year has not been an easy one, with a worldwide pandemic casting shadows nationally, statewide, and here in Northeast Florida. Over the course of the last eight months, there have been numerous obstacles for our region and our local governments to overcome, but optimistically, these obstacles can also be seen as opportunities.

More than ever before, we see that the shocks and stressors that face Northeast Florida do not respect jurisdictional boundaries. In 2020, that includes a pandemic that spurred rising unemployment and lean fiscal year budgets as well as an expanding conversation about the ongoing implications of climate change and sea level rise. These issues underscore the need for our thinking and our actions to transcend our boundaries, to work together, across Northeast Florida.

The Northeast Florida Regional Council, through its programs, is well positioned to assist our counties work through the shocks and stressors of 2020 and future years. Economic Development, Emergency Preparedness and Resiliency efforts come together to assist our communities to plan, prepare, and recover from these types of events. It is valuable that the Council is involved at many levels – participating in local and statewide policy discussions, leveraging federal, state and local partnerships and providing direct technical assistance, all of which benefit the Region and its quality of life for businesses and residents.

As you peruse this annual report, I hope you see it not just as a record of the past but as a call to respond boldly to the future through enlightened regionalism. New programs at the Council are pushing Northeast Florida forward, positioning our communities to thrive in the changing world.

As I hand off the President's gavel to the very capable Mayor Sean Lynch of the Town of Baldwin in Duval County, I am confident that the future of the Council continues to look bright. I have a great deal of pride in my association with this organization and look forward to the years of work ahead as we continue to bring the communities of Northeast Florida together.

Honorable Len Kreger
President
Vice-Mayor, City of Fernandina Beach





RESILIENCY

In the 2019-2020 year, the NEFRC worked on a wide array of stakeholder engagement activities related to community resilience planning. From technical workshops to local government advising; NEFRC's resiliency program continues to evolve. In the face of COVID-19, new priorities related to economic resilience became more clear. Moving forward, the objective of the NEFRC will be to broaden the scope of its resiliency program to include new approaches and best-practices. The NEFRC is committed to assisting local communities in navigating policy challenges related to flooding, sea level rise and the pandemic.

In 2020, NEFRC partnered with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to host a Nature-Based Solutions for Coastal Hazards workshop. More than 45 decision-makers from the Region attended, including elected officials, nonprofit leaders, and coastal management experts. The Council also hosted a panel discussion during the Southeast & Caribbean Disaster Resilience Partnership Meeting.

This year, the NEFRC began assisting Jacksonville City Council with ongoing work related to the "Special Committee on Resiliency." The NEFRC provided planning assistance to City Council on public meetings, draft policy language, and statewide coordination. The Committee is Chaired by NEFRC Board Member Randy DeFoor.

Following a meeting with the Jacksonville District for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the NEFRC partnered with Project Managers for the South Atlantic Coastal Study (SACS) on engagement strategies for the Region. Northeast Florida was selected as a 'Focus Area' of the study as were several 'Sub-Areas' within the region.

During the pandemic, the NEFRC created a *COVID-19 Resource Guide for Small Businesses* with the objective of helping local communities withstand the economic impacts of the current disaster. The guide included details on federal and state guidelines, information on disaster financial assistance, communication and disaster recovery resources, social distancing advice, and tips on how to keep the virus from disrupting business and keeping commercial establishments safe.

Currently, the NEFRC is offering free educational presentations on resilience to interested groups. These presentations cover a range of topics from business continuity planning and community awareness, to infrastructure solutions and understanding environmental vulnerability.

Through a grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA), the NEFRC is in the process of establishing a Northeast Florida Economic Resilience Taskforce that will be comprised of expert representation from across the region. The Taskforce will be charged with developing a Coronavirus Economic Recovery Action Plan for the short-term, and a Regional Economic Resilience Plan in the long-term.



2019 REGIONAL AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE WINNERS

Affordable Housing: *Nassau Habitat for Humanity, Inc.*

Culture and Historic Preservation: *Heritage Park Village, City of Macclenny*

Economic Development and Tourism: *Baldwin Market*

Healthcare Emergency Preparedness: *Jacksonville University Healthcare Simulation Center*

Environmental Stewardship: *Traders Hill Farm & Town of Baldwin Brandy Branch Effluent Reuse Project*

Planning and Growth Management: *St. Johns County - Town of Hastings Dissolution*

Public Safety: *Safer Streets in Flagler County*

Adaptive Reuse: *Kanine Social Jax, FL*

Transportation: *Nassau Express Select*

Quality of Life: *Palatka Trail Town*

Resiliency: *City of Atlantic Beach Vulnerability Assessment*

Special Achievement Award: *Nassau County Youth Emergency Team*

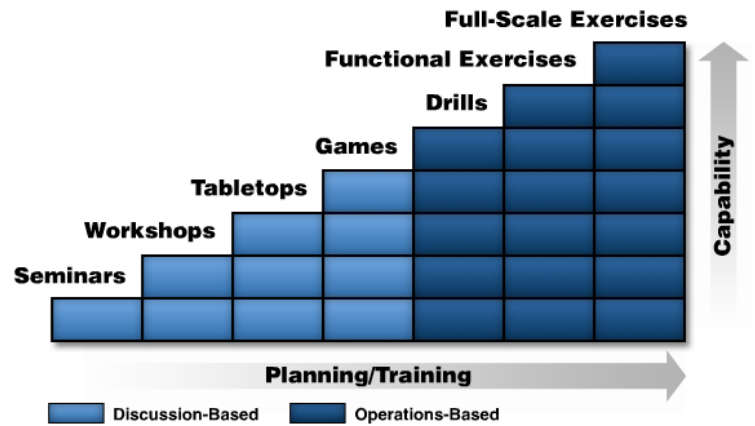
Regional Leadership Award: *Senator Aaron Bean*

TRAINING & EXERCISES

The Council's Training and Exercise Program had a busy year until COVID-19 stopped in-person gatherings. Even with COVID-19 impacts, the Council served the healthcare and hazardous materials communities through a series of training and exercise opportunities to improve capabilities in these sectors. The Council implemented 28 training classes that served 462 people in the healthcare or hazardous materials discipline. Additionally, Council staff planned and conducted six exercises across the region.

Training Courses:

- FDOH Radiological Training
- Advanced HazMat Life Support
- Americares - Health Center Boot Camp
- FDOH Biological Testing and Shipment
- AWR 308 - Natural Disaster Awareness For Caregivers
- COOP Plan Development Workshops
- Shelter-in-Place Training
- Disaster Mental Health Response and Recovery Workshop
- HazMat Tech 160-hour course
- EPCRA - How to Comply
- Infectious Disease Workshops
- PER 320 - Personal Protective Measures for Biological Events



Shelter-in-Place



In early 2020, the Northeast Florida Healthcare Coalition (HCC) and Northeast Florida Local Emergency Planning Committee for Hazardous Materials (LEPC), programs of the NEFRC, partnered to implement a pilot training and exercise program. The goal of the program was to enhance Shelter-in-Place (SIP) capabilities of healthcare facilities for a hazardous materials incident and to assist healthcare facilities with meeting CMS training and testing requirements.

Healthcare agencies were asked to participate in a four-step SIP training and exercise program for facilities to receive a letter of participation from the Healthcare Coalition. Once the internal Shelter-in-Place training was complete, the HCC initiated a community-wide SIP exercise.

The following highlights the 4-step process of the pilot program:

- 1) **PREPARE** - Attend LEPC sponsored SIP training (training offered in all NEFRC counties).
- 2) **IMPLEMENT TRAINING** - Participants conducted staff training at their healthcare facility or community organization on SIP concepts and developed a Shelter-in-Place kit.
- 3) **CONDUCT EXERCISE** - Participants conducted a SIP exercise at their facility or organization on February 25th.
- 4) **EVALUATE EXERCISE** - Participants completed a predeveloped after-action report for their exercise and submitted results through an online survey.

By the Numbers

People who attended LEPC's Shelter-in-Place training	106
Counties SIP training was held	7
Agencies/organizations that conducted a SIP Exercise	48
People who participated in the SIP Exercise:	812
Counties where agency/organization conducted SIP Exercise	12

PLANNING

STRATEGIC REGIONAL POLICY PLAN



First Coast Vision, the vision Northeast Florida created in 2011 with a great deal of participation, sets the tone for Northeast Florida's guiding document, the Strategic Regional Policy Plan. When the Council assessed the plan in June 2019, it recognized the ongoing value of the vision and encouraged the Regional Community Institute to consider the implementation of the vision as a policy issue. After public input meetings in November 2019, staff reviewed the Strategic Regional Policy Plan with the NEFRC Board, updated it and added a Cultivation element to address agriculture, fishing and silviculture and the importance of these activities in the region. Planning directors were provided with a first draft in early spring, 2020, and local governments were provided with a draft update in

August, 2020. The NEFRC Board will consider release of the new proposed plan to the Executive Office of the Governor and reviewing agencies in early October, after which it will be subject to rulemaking.

COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

NEFRC reviewed changes to 65 comprehensive plans proposed and adopted by local governments in the region in FY 19/20. This is done to inform the NEFRC Board about issues and trends in the region, and to meet state requirements regarding potential impacts to resources of regional significance and impacts to neighboring jurisdictions. In addition, NEFRC reviews changes to comprehensive plans to determine where intergovernmental coordination would be beneficial to the region.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

NEFRC staff serve several small municipalities when they require technical assistance with planning issues. In FY 19/20, staff assisted the Town of Callahan with its required evaluation and appraisal of its comprehensive plan, as well as the plan updates the appraisal required. The Town of Beverly Beach also changed its comprehensive plan and future land use map with NEFRC assistance. Staff are currently assisting the Town of Interlachen with consideration of land uses requiring a special exception.

REGIONAL LEADERSHIP ACADEMY/ REGIONAL COMMUNITY INSTITUTE

The Regional Leadership Academy gathers existing leaders from all fields and introduces them to each other, and the issues and challenges facing Northeast Florida. They meet monthly in each county in the region, see interesting and innovative sites and meet people who are changing the world. The Class of 2020 is a diverse and talented group. Their work was put on hold after the February meeting due to the pandemic and will resume in 2021, subject to the ability to safely meet in person.

Graduates of the Regional Leadership Academy become members of the nonprofit Regional Community Institute (RCI), a "think tank" that does policy work for NEFRC. This year, they have examined implementation of First Coast Vision and considered quality of life indicators that could help monitor progress. The RCI was responsible for the creation of First Coast Vision in 2011, and since that time has done policy work on sea level rise, thriving small business, transportation, regional tourism, and water quality and quantity.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The NEFRC works on a broad range of economic development priorities — ranging from Northeast Florida's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) to Regional Tourism and Fiscal Impact Modeling. The NEFRC is the dedicated Economic Development District for the Economic Development Administration (EDA), providing technical assistance for the development of federal grant applications. The NEFRC also owns licensing for REMI PI+ economic modeling software.

Staff worked with members of the CEDS Committee to determine consistency with the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for five projects, two of which were the subject of applications for funding from the EDA's CARES grant program. NEFRC staff worked closely with applicants from JAXUSA, Jacksonville University and the First Coast Fresh Food Innovation Center in Putnam County on potential grant applications.

During the coronavirus pandemic, the NEFRC produced a REMI economic forecast assessment that analyzed the local impacts that the pandemic was having on the region. The results of this analysis were discussed with the NEFRC Board of Directors, reported in local media, and presented by NEFRC staff to five of the regions County Commissions and other groups, including the CEDS Committee and Clay County Chamber of Commerce.

**COMPREHENSIVE
ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT
STRATEGY**

TRANSPORTATION DISADVANTAGED

Florida Commission for the



**Transportation
Disadvantaged**

NEFRC is the "Designated Official Planning Agency" for transportation disadvantaged programs in Baker, Clay, Flagler, Nassau, Putnam and St. Johns Counties. This entails selecting and evaluating the entity that provides para-transit service in each County, assisting with coordination between services and staffing the Local Coordinating Board that oversees the service in each County. FY19/20 saw new 5-year designations of Flagler County as the Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC) in that County, and the Jacksonville Transportation Authority as the CTC in Clay County. NEFRC, together with the Jacksonville Transportation Authority, hosts the Regional Transit Working Group, a voluntary collaborative working on a regional system for transit in Northeast Florida.

NEFRC STAFF

- Beth Payne - CEO
- Donna Starling - CFO
- Sheron Forde - Executive Assistant
- Margo Moehring - Managing Director - Policy and Planning
- Eric Anderson - Emergency Preparedness Manager
- Leigh Wilsey - Healthcare Coalition Program Manager
- Tyler Nolen - Regional Planner - Emergency Preparedness
- Robert Jordan - Regional Planner
- Kate Haigh - Communications Specialist
- Sean Lahav - Resiliency Coordinator
- Carol Main - Accounting/Administrative Assistant
- Nick Cole - Planning Intern

HEALTHCARE



The Healthcare Coalition program growth continues. The NEFRC, through a contract with the Florida Department of Health, manages the Healthcare Coalition program to enhance the capacity and capability of the regional healthcare system. Members work together to plan, equip, train and exercise to increase the resilience of the healthcare system in north Florida. Membership in the Coalition has grown significantly, with 700 individual members (40% increase) and 470 facilities and organizations (24% increase).

Prior to COVID-19, the Healthcare Coalition Program provided multiple workshops for to assist members in developing plans for Continuity of Operations (COOP). COOP plans are vital to response and recovery following an emergency or disaster. In March, the Coalition held three workshops to identify best practices used across the region when dealing with infectious diseases. The best practices and challenges identified during these workshops were timely as the response to COVID-19 began.

The Healthcare Coalition program's annual member project funding opportunity provided \$170,000 for members to complete projects and fill funding gaps. Among the many funded projects was equipment to enhance hospital communications capabilities, decontamination equipment, and training to increase the preparedness of people with disabilities.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

During the COVID-19 response, the Healthcare Coalition Program provided daily and weekly Situation Reports to all sectors of the healthcare system. These reports provided access to the most current essential information on the ever-changing coronavirus healthcare response.

As COVID-19 began to impact the long-term care sector, the Coalition identified a need for PPE training and supplies. The Coalition created a PPE Care Package for more than 150-member nursing home and assisted living facilities. The boxes included 3-ply masks, nitrile gloves and a scenario-based video training developed by the Coalition specifically for the long-term care environment. The training included the basics of the novel coronavirus and how it spreads, safe and effective use of PPE, and information to manage the challenges of isolation and depression in the people they serve.

As a service provided to our partnering counties the Northeast Florida Regional Council is able to provide staff support to our local emergency managers during times of disaster at no cost. During COVID-19 the NEFRC was able to provide staff support to Flagler, Nassau, Putnam and St. Johns counties. Serving in different roles, the NEFRC was able to tailor its response and assistance to the specific needs of each county. This included planning actions for all phases of the pandemic, recovery coordination and day-to-day assistance in a time where our emergency managers are not only dealing with COVID-19 but their normal operations as we begin to move into the 2020 Hurricane season. In total the NEFRC was able to provide our partners with 460 hours of assistance during this pandemic.





LEPC

Over the past year the Northeast Florida Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) for Hazardous Materials has conducted and implemented a series of training and exercise opportunities for first responders in the hazardous materials discipline.

The LEPC planned and conducted a tabletop exercise for Rayonier Advanced Materials, Fernandina Beach Fire Department, and Nassau County Fire and Rescue. The exercise scenario simulated a large-scale anhydrous ammonia release, which allowed participating agencies to test their policies and procedures in a safe and controlled, learning environment.

While the typical training season for the LEPC had to be cut short due to COVID-19, the LEPC was still able to provide specialized training to nearly 240 individuals over 11 regional-based courses. Three of these courses were the 160-hour Hazardous Materials Technician course. This 160-hour course trains firefighters to respond to hazardous materials-based incidents. The LEPC was able to provide one 160-hour course for each regional hazardous materials team, while also including members from various fire departments around the region.

The LEPC was prepared to conduct another tabletop exercise for Anheuser-Busch and Jacksonville Fire and Rescue until it had to be delayed due to the impacts of COVID-19. It is the intent of the planning team to conduct this exercise in the coming year.



PUBLIC RELATIONS

PRESS RELEASES - 4

MEDIA COVERAGE - 4

PRESS COVERAGE - 16

Despite the challenges of 2020, the NEFRC has continued to make an effort to promote its work, partnerships and initiatives in Northeast Florida. The Council's work continues to attract the attention of the press and multi-media outlets across the Region and further afield.

Council programs including resiliency, economic development and the Region 3 Healthcare Coalition continue to draw attention for the the efforts they are making to improve the quality of life for citizens in our area. The work of the Council in the coastal resiliency arena attracted attention as far away as Charlotte and Charleston in 2020.

OUR MISSION

The mission of the NEFRC is to celebrate the unique assets of Northeast Florida and to engage its people, businesses, governments and organizations. In doing so we communicate issues, convene stakeholders, collaborate with others, calculate and analyze, and construct solutions.



Baker County



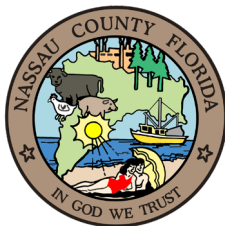
Clay County



Duval County



Flagler County



Nassau County



Putnam County



St. Johns County

2019-2020 OFFICERS

The Board of Directors of the Northeast Florida Regional Council is comprised of 35 members: two thirds elected officials and one-third gubernatorial appointees. They provide the Council with the insight and tools to make critical decisions that affect the quality of life within our Region. The Council officers include the President, the First Vice President, the Second Vice President and the Secretary/Treasurer. The leadership of the Board turns over every October, with the start of a new fiscal year.



Hon. Len Kreger
President
Nassau County



Hon. Sean Lynch
First Vice President
Duval County



Hon. Buddy Goddard
Second Vice President
Putnam County



Mr. Darryl Register
Secretary/Treasurer
Baker County

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Visit us online at nefrc.org