



STRATEGIC

PLAN

SURVEY



REPORT

Prepared by the Office of
Community Information



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Situation Analysis

The City of DeLand started a year-long process of updating its strategic plan.

First adopted in 2000, the strategic plan outlines a vision for the city's future and strategies that should be utilized to get there. It is also a guiding document for the commission and staff when setting the budget.

The city's Strategic Plan serves as a guiding document in everything that we do - whether it is setting policy or the work staff does on a daily basis. Here are strategic focus areas of our current strategic plan:

- Regional high value job creation
- Institute smart growth principles
- Preserving "sense of community" as a key asset
- Creating a connected community
- High value government
- Communication
- Maintaining a safe community
- Preparing for the future/sustainability

The plan was updated in 2005 and city has tried to update the plan every 10 years with 2015 being the last time it was updated. However, given the changes within our community and a city commission led by a new mayor for the first time in more than 20 years, the city is moving forward with an update this year.



About the Survey

To gauge sentiment, the city held several community meetings, however, attendance was not to the level anticipated. The electronic survey method helped capture the prevailing sentiment of our residents.

Surveys are great ways to gather insights and take the pulse of community sentiment.

In this case, the survey provided invaluable information as many of our community meetings had poor attendance.

The survey was developed using open-ended questions asked at the community meetings.

Though not scientific, nearly 800 people participated with more than half of respondents answering all questions asked.



The survey was started by nearly 800 respondents and more than half answered all of the questions. More than 4,500 responses total were collected.



Summary of Findings

Several themes emerged from the questions asked.

DOWNTOWN IS AN ASSET



Downtown was mentioned nearly 500 times in answers given by respondents. Many respondents view downtown as an area of the city that must be protected and maintained.

RESIDENTS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT DEVELOPMENT



Excessive development was cited nearly 300 times in answers given in the survey. Many said it is eroding the city's small town charm.

HOMELESSNESS



Respondents have noticed an increased presence of homeless individuals in the community and it is having an effect on the city's overall appearance and perception of safety.

INFRASTRUCTURE



Many respondents commented on the lack of infrastructure in relation to increased development. Several commented on the increased traffic with little done to expand roadways, overcrowding of schools and relative lack of park space.



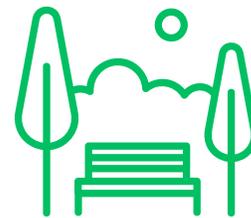
Question:

Think of three other communities that you might like to live in. What do they have that you would like to have in DeLand?

For this question, we asked respondents to think of other cities and list some of their best qualities that DeLand may not have.

Of the cities cited by respondents, Winter Park is mentioned 30 times, Mt. Dora is mentioned 25 times, New Smyrna Beach - 13 times - and Sanford is mentioned by 11 respondents.

When citing these communities, people valued the green space and walkability offered by these various locations.



Variety in dining options especially in the city's downtown corridor was cited as a desire - with it being mentioned 50 times in responses.

Respondents also cited a desire for better planned subdivisions and less housing density altogether.

"The massive cookie cutter neighborhoods being built all over DeLand are an eye sore and taking away from what makes the DeLand area special."



Question:

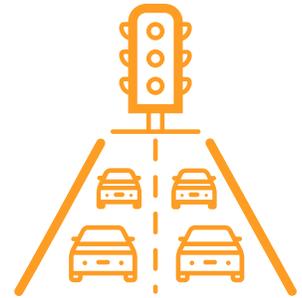
What is one feature that could be added to the City that would improve the quality of life in DeLand?



More park and green space was again a key concern and desire with some respondents being more specific such as wanting kid-friendly features such as a splash pad or pool or amenities such as walking paths.

"Community Waterpark; The springs are great but a lazy river and lap swimming open to the public at reasonable rates is something greatly needed. Water Aerobics/ swim lessons/ birthday parties etc. Chisholm Center Pool is never open and not inviting to general public."

Updating infrastructure such as roads, sidewalks, healthcare facilities and our schools to keep up with growth was cited several times by respondents.



Respondents across the board generally don't want to see more housing projects coming to the city. However, respondents to this question also noted there is a need for affordable housing.

"People who live and work in DeLand don't make that (much) money, and can't afford to live there. We need real affordable solutions."



Question:

What opportunities should the city pursue?

Many of the same themes such as park space, infrastructure, less development were touched on for all of the questions posed. Rather than belaboring those themes, we've highlighted some of the more thoughtful responses below:

"Live here, work here, play here' opportunities versus opportunities that simply grow us as a bedroom community."



"Attract business creating more employment opportunity targeted to help families with lower incomes gain better income."

"The Putnam property presents an opportunity to reimagine what downtown DeLand could be. Connecting it with the Athens Theater and the Old Courthouse could create a unique green space or square not on a state highway. "

"Continuing the outreach to Spring Hill and add better sidewalks/bike paths for all residents to get downtown and around"



"More parks, trails and places for people to gather outside of downtown proper."

"Cultural, and recreational activities, more diverse restaurants and shops"



"Spring training baseball team."

"Keeping DeLand the small, quiet residential city that we all moved here to enjoy."



Question:

If you chose to live in DeLand, what factors were key in making that decision?

DeLand's population has experienced incredible growth over the last decade with roughly 27,000 residents registered in the 2010 Census and more than 37,000 in the 2020 Census - a growth rate of 9.25 percent. So it is important to ask **why** people are moving here.

"Small town" and "downtown" are cited in nearly 200 of respondent's answers. The word "community" appears about 49 times in responses. It should be noted that a number of survey takers believe growth is eating away at the qualities that brought them here.

"It was a quiet, peaceful, charming community. It is now over populated."

"Small town feel, family-oriented, safe - but I do not feel like we are preserving these qualities."

Proximity to amenities such as the beach and big cities was another reason given by respondents for moving here.

"Small town feel, but close to major cities. Traffic is not bad. Cost of living is lower than bigger cities."

The city's events and festivals were also listed a major draw to live in DeLand.



"Small Town life. Less traffic, more friendly people. Strong sense of community & preservation of historic buildings. Celebrations and parades, hometown events."



Question:

What is your greatest hope and greatest fear for DeLand?

"I hope that DeLand will expand upon the things that make it a nice place to live. I fear it will become another copycat sprawling suburb with no character or uniqueness (like Deltona, Altamonte Springs, Brandon, or any number of other suburbs in this state)."

"Greatest hope: We lead the state in developing a small city that provides affordable housing, multimodal transportation options, and parks that showcase and preserve our beautiful natural areas.

Greatest fear: We focus on developing on the city periphery without planning for bicycle and pedestrian safety and become yet another sprawling suburb where getting around requires a car and where trees and natural spaces are sparse."

"That what's left of the small town feel can be preserved. Biggest fear is that we are at the point of no return with the over development. No adequate schools and traffic is getting out of control."

"That it will grow into a place where everyone feels welcome not just those with money. Fear - It will grow too much without enough policing and crime will be rampant."

"DeLand continues to feel small. My fear is that we continue to grow to fast and the citizens that have lived her 20+ years are the ones to pay for it."

"My greatest hope is that DeLand will embrace the small, historic town feeling that drew us to this area. My greatest fear is that, you will continue to clear cut massive areas for huge subdivisions and put further strain on our roads and schools."



Question:

What makes DeLand distinctive?

The city's downtown and small town feel are what people feel distinguishes DeLand from other cities - as respondents cited these qualities more than 200 times in their answers.

"Downtown- hip and historic at the same time. Still has small town feel despite growth."

"Its historic beautiful downtown, the citizens who fight to keep it small because they cherish its distinctive hometown feel, the families who've lived here for generations, the beautiful landscape of the places still left untouched by construction."

DeLand's community spirit and embrace of diverse cultures as well as our history was another distinctive trait pointed out by respondents.

"I love how when we go out around DeLand, we always run into someone we know. That is what I love about small towns, the sense of community that residents are able to foster."

"It has one high school. We close our downtown streets to have parades. When kids grow and leave, they can come back and still feel they are part of the community."

"I think that Stetson is truly the biggest gem in DeLand's crown. That and the historic buildings: The courthouse, the Athens Theater, and other various remarkable buildings that are so worth preserving."



Question:

The future will bring change to DeLand. What feature would you like to keep as we change. What feature would you reduce or eliminate?

The same themes seen throughout the survey are also found here: people wish to keep or maintain downtown and the small town feel and stop or limit development.

"I hope we can keep our uniqueness, trees and small town charm as they seem to be disappearing rapidly..."

"The small town feeling, is what makes DeLand special. Don't ever change that aspect. I want the city to stop cutting down so many trees and clearing land to continually build massive neighborhoods."

"Reduce the speed of growth until the infrastructure can catch up. Keep the small town feel."

"...I love our area and the future should embrace a theme such as "A small town with a big heart." Building a big town with no infrastructure and no upward mobility would be cruel to future generations. DeLand is beautiful and it should feel like a drive through paradise anyplace we go. Traffic and eyesores need to be worked on big time."

"We should keep the small hometown feel along with the rich history and diversity. I understand that cities must grow, but we need to absolutely stop forcing the growth at a rate that isn't sustainable while ignoring the people who currently live and work here in favor of importing people from out of town."

"Keep an emphasis on history, charm and community. Our 100-200 year old homes and giant oaks are a treasure, our downtown sector is the heart of the town and something that NONE of the other cities in Volusia have..."



Conclusions

Downtown and small town feel are valued by residents.

The city's downtown and small town are what brought many people here. The city should continue to look for ways to invest in the downtown corridor.

Growth and development are seen as a negative aspects for the city, and are seen as possible dangers to the city's greatest assets.

Growth and development are inevitable. But many feel these issues are chipping away at the qualities that brought them here.

Residents would like to see a focus on infrastructure to include green space and parks.

If growth is going to continue, residents expressed a need for the city to keep pace with roadway development and amenities like parks and green space for walking.

