

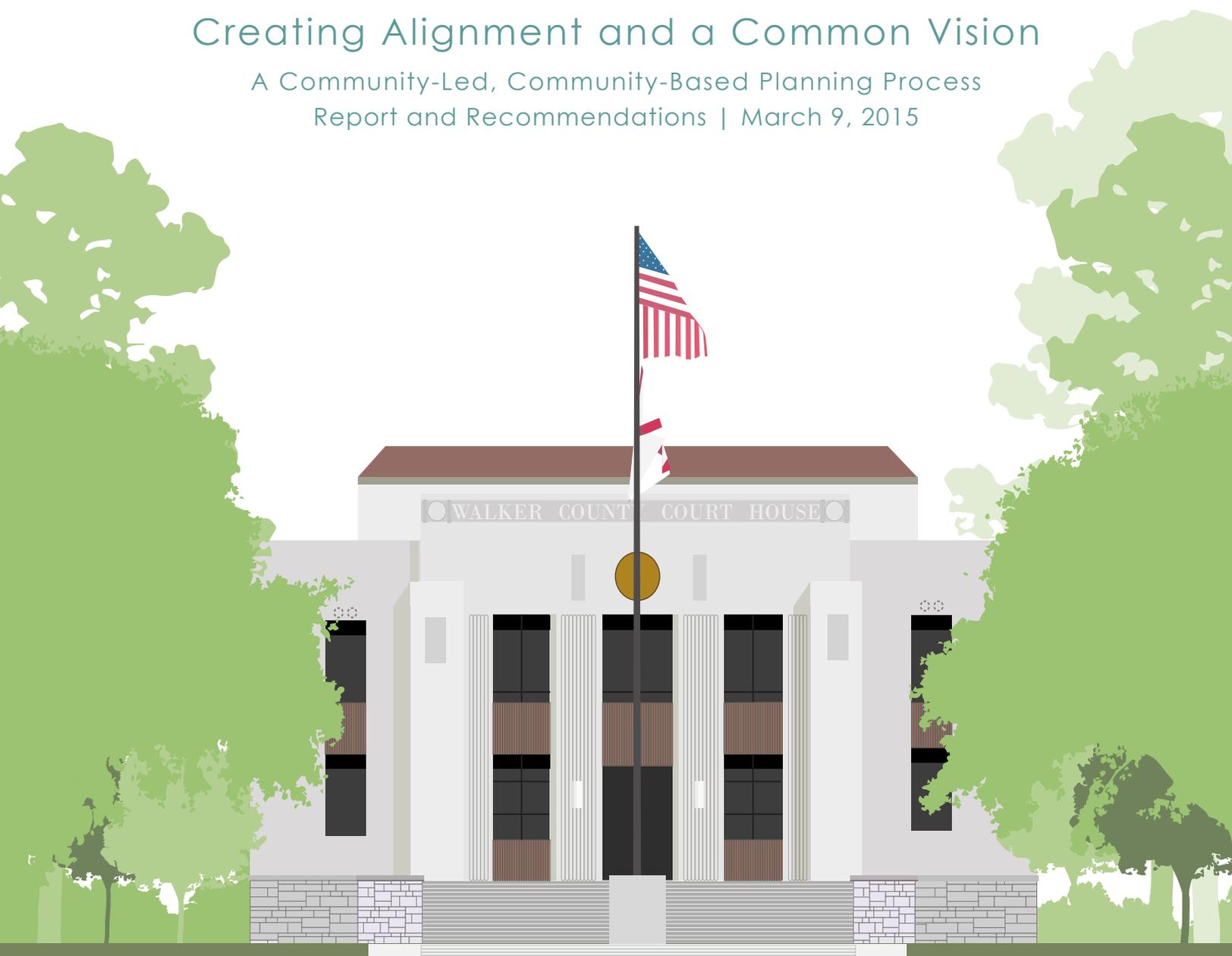


# WALKER COUNTY

— ○ A L A B A M A ○ —

## Creating Alignment and a Common Vision

A Community-Led, Community-Based Planning Process  
Report and Recommendations | March 9, 2015



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# Executive Summary

In 2014, the Walker Area Community Foundation, in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce of Walker County, Walker County Commission, City of Jasper, mayors from communities across Walker County, and a number of other leaders and private citizens throughout the county, led a nearly year-long initiative to develop a vision and plan for Walker County. The initiative engaged more than five hundred community stakeholders, and feedback from those stakeholders is included in two supporting documents:

- Walker Area Community Foundation Strategic Plan: Generation Walker (2013)
- Creating Alignment and Common Vision: Executive Summary of Stakeholder Feedback (2014)

All of this feedback has been rolled into one plan for Walker County presented in a grid that defines the vision, priority areas, goals, and initiatives that collectively outline a path to a prosperous future for Walker County. This report presents the plan for Walker County that resulted from the visioning initiative as well as recommendations for how to move the plan forward to implementation.

## Background

In recent years, several community-based planning processes in Walker County led to the engagement of key stakeholders representing a diverse range of interests and expertise to consider Walker County's future. These processes, including Walker Area Community Foundation's strategic planning process Generation Walker, and the Chamber of Commerce's Forward Walker County, revealed that the citizens of Walker County and its communities are keenly aware that today affords the area a unique window of opportunity to move toward growth and prosperity. Moreover, these stakeholders agreed that in order to take advantage of this time of opportunity, the community needed a thoughtful, unified effort to chart a course for a prosperous future.

## Visioning Process

A collaboration between the Walker Area Community Foundation and individuals from the Walker County community helped give form to the idea of "a thoughtful, unified effort." The result was a bold and visionary initiative called "Creating Alignment and a Common Vision" that reached communities across Walker County to gather input about what shared future the community wants.

Over the course of several months during the summer of 2014, nearly five hundred Walker County residents gathered together to discuss a vision for the future and the assets they have in place to build on in achieving their common vision. The focus of discussions included both Walker County as a whole and individual communities. The specific feedback gathered during that process is presented in a separate document entitled Creating Alignment and Common Vision: Executive Summary of Stakeholder Feedback.

# The Plan for Walker County

Following the visioning meetings, a smaller group of engaged citizens gathered to review the feedback from the initiative. Their aim was to develop a plan that would respond to the ideas and concerns voiced by Walker County residents and map a path forward to a prosperous future for the county. The plan is built around one central vision for Walker County:

“A Place We All Proudly Call Home”

This vision captures several key themes expressed by stakeholders during the process: Walker County is cherished for the people, communities, businesses, natural beauty, and recreational resources that make Walker County unique and contribute to its excellent quality of life.

To support this vision, the plan identifies four organizing themes that represent key areas of focus for the plan. These are People, Place, Perception, and Partnership

Within the four organizing themes are seven priority areas with goal statements that will guide the community's work toward achieving the plan's vision.

For each priority area, the plan identifies **ongoing initiatives** that are already underway and making progress toward the specific goals for that priority area. The plan also identifies **initiatives to be developed**, which are projects or programs that have yet to be formed that will build capacity or progress toward the goals for that priority area.

It should be noted that many of the priority areas are overlapping and related to one another. Each priority area will contribute to success of the plan as a whole as well as to the success of other individual priority areas.

- 1. Healthy Lifestyles**
- 2. Building Our Workforce**
- 3. Building Infrastructure**
- 4. Recreation & Green Spaces**
- 5. Vibrant Communities**
- 6. Branding & Image**
- 7. Infrastructure for Collaboration & Implementation**

# Vision for Walker County

## “A Place We All Proudly Call Home”

Steven Ames, a Portland-based planner recognized for his work in the area of community visioning, explains that visioning, “produces a statement describing the community’s preferred future. The vision statement represents the community’s desired ‘destination’ – a shared image of where it would like to be in the long-term future.”<sup>1</sup> The image of Walker County as “A Place We All Proudly Call Home” is certainly a destination that residents will want to put their time, energy, and resources into reaching.

This vision of Walker County captures several key themes expressed by stakeholders during the visioning initiative: Walker County is cherished for the people, communities, businesses, natural beauty, and recreational resources. The vision statement captures the idea that the positive things going on in Walker County can be built upon and enhanced, while the challenges of the community can be addressed and made part of a bright future for the community.

This vision also suggests the idea that Walker County will be a community of choice for businesses and industry as well as people. It will be a community of choice for companies, corporations, and businesses looking to locate or grow in a community with a strong workforce and great quality of life. It will also be a community of choice for individuals who grew up in the area and want to stay or return, those that may seek to move to the county later in life, and visitors and tourists that will come to the county on a short-term basis to enjoy what residents know and love about this unique place.

The vision statement for the plan for Walker County sets the tone and direction for the rest of the plan. In addition, four organizing themes of people, place, perception, and partnership help describe high-level goals for the plan and provide a framework for organizing the priority areas of the plan. Each of these themes is described on the following page of this report.

During the Creating Alignment and a Common Vision initiative, more than five hundred participants provided their personal experiences, creative ideas, and thoughtful descriptions to help articulate a vision for Walker County’s future. While the body of ideas related to Walker County’s vision is broad-based and inclusive, all of these ideas can be distilled into one central vision for Walker County.

<sup>1</sup> Steven Ames, Journal of Futures Studies, November 2010, <http://www.jfs.tku.edu.tw/15-2/S05.pdf>.

# Organizing Themes

## People

Walker County communities overwhelmingly agree that people are the county's greatest asset. Participants in the visioning process described their neighbors as generous, committed, friendly, and hardworking. Involvement in organizations such as non-profits and the faith-based community is one example of how the people of Walker County make it thrive. The plan for Walker County recognizes and builds on the strength of its people by focusing on the priority areas of:

1. Healthy Lifestyles
2. Building Our Workforce



## Place

Walker County residents recognize many of its assets are tied to its physical location and the history, communities, and enterprises that have developed there over time. From location and natural resources to the unique towns that dot the Walker County landscape, place is a key strength of Walker County. The plan for Walker County promotes investment in place by focusing on the priority areas of:

3. Building Infrastructure
4. Recreation and Green Spaces
5. Vibrant Communities



These seven priority areas serve as the pillars of the plan for Walker County and the mechanisms for guiding action and progress. The following pages describe each priority area and the action items and initiatives that will help achieve each of the priority area goals as well as the plan's overall vision.

## Perception

The ease with which residents name the assets they see across the county and in local communities is a testament to the wealth of resources present in Walker County. Residents named specific physical resources as well as ongoing initiatives, programs, and processes that they would like to see continue. In addition to naming these positive things in the community, residents acknowledged Walker County has long been plagued with a negative public image. The plan for Walker County promotes a positive perception of the county by focusing on the priority area of:

6. Branding and Image



## Partnership

Throughout the Creating Alignment and Common Vision process, Walker County residents voiced their appreciation for the opportunity to collaborate with their neighbors and community leaders and desired to see such collaboration continue beyond the life of the initiative. Moreover, leadership and participants were anxious to know the results of the plan and build on momentum to see implementation of the great ideas shared in community meetings. The plan for Walker County builds on momentum and a growing desire for partnership and progress by focusing on the priority area of:

7. Infrastructure for Collaboration and Implementation



# Priority Areas & Initiatives



## Healthy Lifestyles

### Goal:

We maintain healthy lifestyles and access to excellent health services.

### Overview:

Building a healthy community was a key priority among stakeholders in the visioning initiative, yet the current snapshot of health in Walker County is grim. A study revealed that Walker County ranks 65th out of 67 Alabama counties in regards to outcomes for health and wellbeing. Rates of obesity, diabetes, teenage pregnancy, premature death, and infant and child mortality are higher than the national and Alabama averages. Because of the great divide between the vision for a healthy Walker County and the current health reality, addressing the health needs of the community is a top priority.

The Healthy Lifestyles priority focuses on improving health outcomes in Walker County through education, policy changes, and infrastructure improvements. Achieving the goal of maintaining healthy lifestyles and access to excellent health services will require individual as well as community action. As initiatives for healthy lifestyles continue to take shape, a marketing campaign could help promote broad community buy-in and awareness of the county's health challenges as well as some solutions, including access to healthy food choices, increased physical activity, elimination of drug use, and development of green spaces for recreation. An effort to research and track health indicators will also provide a mechanism for showing progress toward the goal of overall community health and wellness.

### [Ongoing Initiatives]

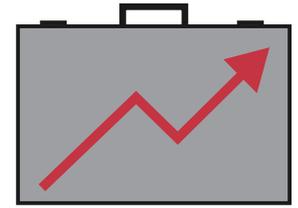
The Health Action Partnership of Walker County (HAP) is a lead partner in several ongoing initiatives related to healthy lifestyles in Walker County. HAP is a coalition of organizations, individuals and agencies working together to holistically improve health outcomes in Walker County. Key initiatives HAP is leading related to healthy lifestyles in Walker County include:

- Healthy Food Choices, an initiative to improve healthy food access in the county
- Livable Communities, an initiative to increase active living and improve physical environments
- Healthy People, an initiative to improve overall community wellness

### [Initiatives to be Developed]

- Track Health Indicators
- Address Drug Problem
- Increase Green Spaces (See Recreation and Green Spaces)

# Priority Areas & Initiatives



## Building Our Workforce

### Goal:

We maintain a strong economy with a prepared workforce.

### Overview:

Economic development and employment were consistent themes during the visioning process. Participants' vision for Walker County included a thriving economy, diverse job opportunities, and a strong workforce. Participants also identified many assets already in place that will promote a strong economy and workforce including the current base of retail and industry; existing industrial parks; transportation amenities such as rail, highways, rivers, airport; and a strong educational system.

The Building Our Workforce priority focuses on two key components: education to prepare a strong workforce and collaborative efforts to support, grow, and recruit business, retail, and industry. Education is a key component of a strong economy and prepared workforce, and all levels of education are included. Research shows children who attend quality pre-K programs are more likely to score well on achievement tests, graduate from high school, and go on to college and/or well-paying jobs as adults. Beyond that, career and technical training helps build knowledge and skills that promote success in the workplace. There are several key initiatives underway in Walker County to support education from pre-K to workforce readiness. Supporting, growing, and recruiting business and industry is also a key component of a strong economy. A new initiative and collaborative effort will be formed around development of an integrated industrial recruitment plan to provide jobs for Walker County's workforce.

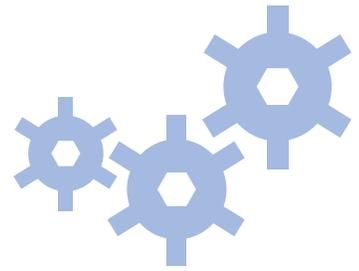
### [Ongoing Initiatives]

- Pre-K, a joint initiative of the United Way of Central Alabama, Jasper City Board of Education, Walker County Board of Education, and the Walker Area Community Foundation to promote kindergarten readiness in the county
- Workforce Readiness, an initiative to build skills and knowledge for today's work environment led by a partnership among the Chamber of Commerce of Walker County, Jasper Industrial Development Board, Walker County Economic Development Authority, Bevill State Community College, and Walker County Board of Education
- Workforce Development Committee, a collaboration of Bevill State Community College, Chamber of Commerce of Walker County, and Walker County Center of Technology working toward an ADECA grant for an incubator

### [Initiatives to be Developed]

- Integrated Industrial Recruitment Plan

# Priority Areas & Initiatives



## Building Infrastructure

### Goal:

We grow through wise and thoughtful planning.

### Overview:

During the visioning process, stakeholders felt strongly that development of infrastructure will be critical for a successful future for Walker County. Participants expressed a desire to see improved transit-related infrastructure, and improved roads, bridges with bike lanes and sidewalks that complement a complete public transportation system throughout the county. Stakeholders recognized that a high-quality, well maintained infrastructure allowed residents, business, and industry to take advantage of the amenities that are Walker County.

Stakeholders also focused on the fact that Walker County has the benefit of a strategic location along the recently opened I-22 corridor. Stakeholders in Walker County, especially leaders and elected officials, said this as a key opportunity for the future of Walker County. Individual communities in Walker County also expressed a desire to leverage their locations along the I-22 corridor for growth and development. Stakeholders were confident that a clear vision and well-structured plan for growth along the I-22 corridor would unlock economic and industrial potential for Walker County.

When establishing The Building Our Infrastructure priority the stakeholders recognized that successful communities have well-developed plans for their physical and business supportive infrastructure.

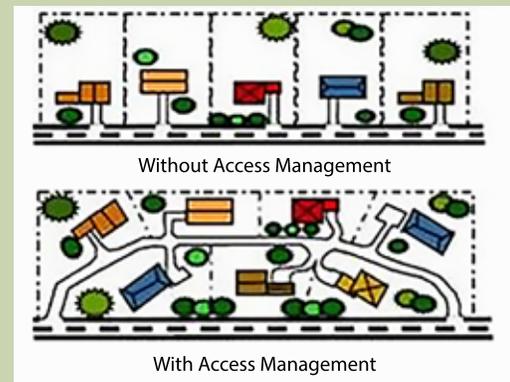
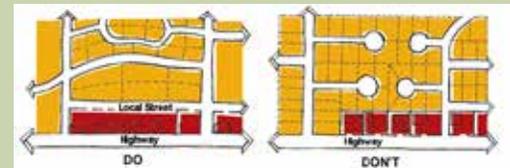
Any planning for physical infrastructure should prioritize improvements to existing infrastructure and careful planning for the development of the I-22 interchanges. The I-22 interchanges and their future development will influence economic development throughout the county, properly functioning interchanges are the gateways to expansion.

Ongoing planning for business infrastructure should prioritize the development of an inventory of current business services and facilities and review current trends and patterns in retention and expansion of business.

There are eleven interchanges on I-22 within Walker County and varying levels of development control for each interchange. Interchange management is dependent on local controls and ALDOT regulations. Business services and facilities and review current trends and patterns in retention and expansion of

## [Ongoing Initiatives]

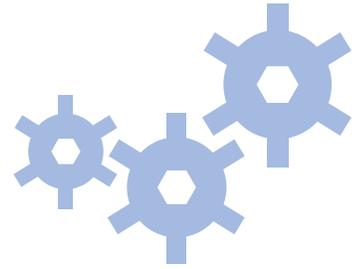
- I-22 Working Group  
The I-22 working is currently in place. Satisfactory completion of one access management plan in 2015 is an achievable goal.



## [Initiatives to be Developed]

- Infrastructure Inventory  
Walker County in cooperation with the ALDOT maintains an assessment of the condition of county roadways. This is an excellent starting place for examining the scope of infrastructure investment required.

# Priority Areas & Initiatives



business.

There are eleven interchanges on I-22 within Walker County and varying levels of development control for each interchange.

Interchange management is dependent on local controls and ALDOT regulations.

The interchanges in Jasper at SR 269, SR-69 and SR-118 have City of Jasper zoning control and they are State Routes subject to ALDOT Access Management Manual standards. These level one interchanges have the most complete control.

The next level two interchanges at SR-118 and SR-13, they are state routed within unincorporated Walker County. The access at these two interchanges will be managed by ALDOT Access Management Manual standards and the application of those standards will help preserve the functional integrity of the interchange.

The third level of interchange management is the remaining interchange within the City of Jasper, the Industrial Parkway interchange. This interchange has developed well over time. The development at the southern end of Industrial Parkway has matured as expected and the northern end of Industrial Parkway is developing in an extremely orderly manner.

And finally fourth level are the five interchanges at Nauvoo Road, Wire Road, CR-20, Cordova-Gorgas Road, and Flat Creek Road. The development of these interchanges are totally under the control of Walker County. The only practical tool for management of adjoining property access is the issuance of driveway permits.

Guidance from the 2013 ALDOT Access Management Manual strongly states that it is through a cooperative relationship between the ALDOT and local agencies that the safety and operational benefits of access management can be fully realized on all roads in Alabama.

The Manual also recognizes that the District Manager, through discussions with the applicant, will make an initial determination of the level of study and coordination required by the Alabama Department of Transportation. Subsequent to contact with the District Manager, the need for a project concept meeting will be determined. It is logical that Walker County embrace a cooperative approach enlisting the City of Jasper, the County Commission and the impacted landowners to develop an interchange plan that moves everyone forward and benefits the entire county.

Each interchange has unique characteristics and an approach that recognizes this and works within the individual constraints to develop a plan prior to development has a higher probability of success than waiting to scurry to bring together a range of regulations at the first development activity.

## [Initiatives to be Developed]

### •Infrastructure Financing

This is the most vexing problem facing Walker County. The county should investigate the funding possibilities that can be created within the county. It is unlikely that another ATRIPS program will materialize in the near future. Funding for roadway improvements need county level funding. During the examination of sources and the proposal for new financing the solution should span political boundaries. The problem doesn't belong to any one level of county or municipal government.

### •Infrastructure Strategy

If a solution is to be supported it will need to have a clearly articulated set of strategies and benchmarks. The proposed strategy will be scaled to the level of the financing available. There will be a set of strategies in cooperation with the ALDOT for State maintained roadways and a set of strategies for all the remaining roadways.

# Priority Areas & Initiatives



## Recreation and Green Spaces

### Goal:

We and our visitors enjoy our abundant natural resources through recreation.

### Overview:

Recreation and Green Spaces is the priority with the closest alignment between the community's vision and the assets it has in place that will help achieve that vision. Every community named "recreational development" as a critical part of its vision for Walker County, and every community included "natural and recreational resources" among the county's greatest assets. The stage is set for development of recreational resources throughout Walker County.

Participants named existing natural and recreational resources in Walker County including Walker County Lake, rivers, wilderness areas, and existing parks and green spaces. Residents said they want to see these resources enhanced to include hiking trails, walking trails, bird watching trails, parks, hunting and fishing, and campgrounds. A number of participants also want to see development of a sports complex and similar resources such as pools, tennis courts, and splash pads. Individual communities also have unique assets and visions for recreation. For example, residents in Cordova focused on the development of the riverfront while the Oakman community would like to see expansion and improvement of Veterans Park & Trail. These community priorities can be integrated into community master plans (see Vibrant Communities).

The Recreation and Green Spaces priority focuses primarily on planning and development at a county-wide level. Initiatives to be developed include an integrated recreation master plan for the county, a catalyst project, and expansion and coordination of regional greenways and blueways.

### [Ongoing Initiatives]

- Green Space Inventory, an effort of Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham and Walker County Commission to inventory existing recreational resources in the county
- Development of Walker County Lake, an initiative led by the Health Action Partnership to expand and develop recreational opportunities at Walker County Lake

### [Initiatives to be Developed]

- Integrated Recreation Master Plan
- Catalyst Project
- Regional Greenway/ Blueway Expansion and Coordination



# Priority Areas & Initiatives



## Vibrant Communities

### Goal:

We grow and sustain vital communities.

### Overview:

During the visioning process, participants emphasized their communities' unique history, traditions, assets, and goals for future progress. From recreation and housing development to community facilities and municipal services, each community articulated a unique set of priorities. Common themes among these priorities included a strong emphasis on community development and beautification, recreational development, community engagement, and retail growth and recruitment.

The Vibrant Communities priority focuses on developing individual community master plans and community retail plans. Each community in Walker County could have a unique plan for how it wants its future to look and how to build on its resources. Each plan would be informed by the overall vision for Walker County, and successful efforts in each community would contribute to the realization of creating a comprehensively successful and dynamic county. Building strong local economies is also an essential part of creating vibrant communities. Local retail and economic development plans could be created and implemented to promote supporting local businesses and bringing in new jobs.

The Creating Alignment and a Common Vision process created momentum and experience that could help inform local community planning efforts. Resources and experience developed as a result of the process include broad engagement of local stakeholders, implementation of a collaborative planning process, and feedback for each community presented in Creating Alignment and Common Vision: Executive Summary of Stakeholder Feedback (2014). An additional resource named by participants included Auburn University's Urban Studio which has developed plans for communities across Alabama.

## [Ongoing Initiatives]

- Cordova Long-Term Recovery Plan, a plan to rebuild Cordova being led by City of Cordova with key support from Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs and the Federal Emergency Management Agency
- Main Street Alabama
- ACE
- Your Town Alabama
- Design Alabama

## [Initiatives to be Developed]

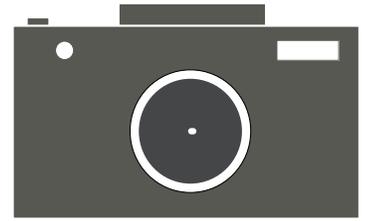
- Individual Community Master Plans
- Community Retail Plans



Creating Jobs. Keeping Character.



# Priority Areas & Initiatives



## Branding and Imaging

### Goal

We value and communicate the bountiful blessings of our home in Walker County.

### Overview

Walker County residents conveyed a strong sense of pride in the people, resources, and positive things happening across the county and in their local communities. At the same time, residents acknowledged Walker County has long been plagued with negative attitudes and a negative public image. Stakeholders felt strongly that concerted efforts to promote the positives in the county will begin to transform the image of the county and lead to positive outcomes such as increased tourism, population growth, economic development, and more vibrant communities. Stated differently, residents felt Walker County should start telling its story in a way that promotes a positive image of the county, recognizes community assets and resources, and instills pride in the community.

Participants in the visioning process also expressed a sense of urgency about promoting the positives in the county. They spoke about the following key elements of a positive image and brand for the county:

- Key Messages: Walker County story, county assets, new ideas and innovation, friendly people, quality of life, and where the future direction of the community
- Audiences: Local, state-wide, and national audiences
- Vehicles: Website, social media, community newsletter, visitor center, and marketing campaign

The Branding and Image priority focuses on the messages, audiences, and vehicles stated above through initiatives to create a Walker County brand and build that brand through an online presence, infographic video, and marketing campaign.

## [Ongoing Initiatives]

The Chamber of Commerce of Walker County is currently working on several branding and image initiatives that were identified through the Chamber's Forward Walker County planning process including:

- Increase Tourism, an initiative to promote a higher volume of tourists in Walker County
- Walker County Image, an initiative to promote a positive image of Walker County
- Tourism Marketing Plan, an initiative to market unique Walker County tourist destinations

## [Initiatives to be Developed]

- Create a Brand
- Online Presence
- Infographic Video
- Marketing Campaign

# Priority Areas & Initiatives



## Infrastructure for Collaboration and Implementation

### Goal

We work together as a community to build and maintain our home.

### Overview

During the visioning process, participants were asked the following question: “In order to realize our vision for Walker County, what will we need to start doing?” The most common answers from participants were related to “Partnership and Collaboration” and “Community Engagement.” Participants articulated a strong desire for more collaboration and meetings, to continue momentum started through the visioning process, and to see action toward implementation of their vision.

The Infrastructure for Collaboration and Implementation priority focuses on addressing participants’ loud and clear message that collaboration, partnership, and action are needed for plan implementation and success. The priority assumes creation or continuation of an entity or partnership – however formal or informal – to lead the implementation process. This group, the “Community Advisory Board”, would help the community stay focused on the plan as a whole, rather than just individual pieces. It would also work to ensure the community remains informed about progress toward implementation of the plan.

One key element of implementation will be development of an online presence and dashboard for the plan to give the plan an identity and continue building support and buy-in for its many initiatives. The plan for Walker County is long-term and will involve individuals, organizations, and agencies from throughout the community. This priority works to continue to drive all of these partners and initiatives toward the plan’s vision: “A Place We All Proudly Call Home.”

### [Ongoing Initiatives]

A number of individuals representing a range of organizations and communities volunteered to make the Creating Alignment and Common Vision initiative a success and a catalyst for positive movement in the community.

- Creating Alignment and a Common Vision, an community-led, community-based planning process and initiative to develop a community-wide vision for Walker County

### [Initiatives to be Developed]

- Sustainable Infrastructure for Collaboration and Implementation (see following page)
- Implementation Model and Timeline
- Online Presence and Dashboard
- Benchmarking Trips

# Preliminary Implementation

The Creating Alignment and a Common Vision initiative was launched as a result of the Walker Area Community Foundation's strategic planning process. The Foundation funded the initiative and its outcome: a high-level plan and vision for Walker County developed through the input of nearly five hundred community stakeholders.

With a plan in place, a sustainable implementation structure for the plan must be identified. Below is a proposed presumptive model for the plan's implementation structure over the next several years. This model recognizes the value of and builds on existing strategic plans and ongoing initiatives already in place in Walker County today. This model also is aligned with identified community resources to support the plan. Of course, with additional resources, the timeline can be accelerated.

It is critical for the plan's implementation process to have an online presence, including a dashboard for the community at large to stay up-to-date on progress. This online presence will not only track progress toward implementation of the plan for Walker County, but also on other key planning processes such as the Chamber of Commerce's Forward Walker County plan and the Foundation's Generation Walker plan. The community is highly invested in the success of all three of these plans.

## Preliminary Design for Collaboration and Implementation Infrastructure

### Phase I: Community Advisory Board with Part-Time Administrator

Timeline: Years 1 – 2

Description: Partners committed to implementation meet regularly to track and promote progress for each priority area working group. Primary tasks to include:

- Work through identified teams for each priority area using an integrated project team model to get started with development of overall plan timeline and prioritization
- Identify lead partners for priority areas and initiatives
- Coordinate dashboard and online presence for the plan
- Coordinate with other strategic plans
- Report to the community at large on a regular basis

### Phase II: Part-Time Executive Director with Administrator

Timeline: Years 2- 3

Description: As momentum, buy-in, and resources for implementation increase, a part-time Executive Director would be hired to manage implementation and day-to-day work on the plan.

### Phase III: Full-Time Executive Director with Administrator

Timeline: Years 4 to the Future

Description: As momentum, buy-in, and resources for implementation increase, a full-time Executive Director would be needed to manage implementation and day-to-day work on the plan.

# Consultant's Recommendations

Below are several recommendations based on Clarus' observations and insight developed throughout the visioning process. These recommendations are presented for consideration by Foundation leadership as implementation of the Walker County plan moves forward.

- **Online Presence and Brand for the Walker County Plan.** A critical tool for supporting implementation and generating funding will be the creation of an identity for the Walker County plan through a branding initiative and development of an online presence (website and Facebook page). The brand and online presence will in a sense serve as the “glue” for the plan by promoting understanding of the plan, buy-in from community stakeholders, and a place to promote plan-related initiatives, updates, progress, and successes.

- **Benchmarking Chattanooga's Lyndhurst Foundation.** The Lyndhurst Foundation, a non-profit organization that invests in the long-term success of the greater Chattanooga region, played a critical role in the transformation of Chattanooga beginning in the 1980s. The positive impact of the Lyndhurst Foundation and its involvement in Chattanooga Venture, make it an excellent organization for the Foundation and the visioning initiative to benchmark.

- **Early Implementation Support.** While the plan for Walker County is a long-term plan, there are many opportunities for early action and implementation. Early actions could be supported by the immediate identification of back office support and volunteer leadership for each priority area. This would provide sufficient support to keep the plan moving while being flexible enough to evolve as a longer-term implementation structure is identified and put in place.

- **Identification of Outside Funding Sources.** The plan for Walker County tells an incredible story about how more than 500 stakeholders have aligned around a clear set of priorities to take advantage of an unprecedented opportunity for positive growth and change in their community. This story should be used as a foundation to seek funding from sources outside of Walker County including but not limited to state resources such as ADECA and EDAP, regional corporate foundations, and national foundations.

- **Celebrating Successes.** As early implementation begins and mechanisms for tracking progress are established, it will be critical to celebrate successes. Reinforcing and showcasing successes can be an effective tool for reminding stakeholders of the importance of the work at hand and strengthening alignment and momentum around shared goals.

- **Mechanism for Tracking Progress and Accountability.** A number of collaborations, programs, and initiatives related to the plan's priorities have already begun forming. This type of positive movement highlights the need for a tracking mechanism to record and share progress with stakeholders across the county. Each priority area working group should be encouraged to identify priorities and report on them regularly. The Steering Committee, and later Executive Director, should establish a dashboard available to the public to report progress. The plan for Walker County is broad and inclusive. Many stakeholders from a range of organizations and communities will be involved in the plan's implementation. Therefore, it is critical to establish clear and accessible mechanisms for tracking progress.