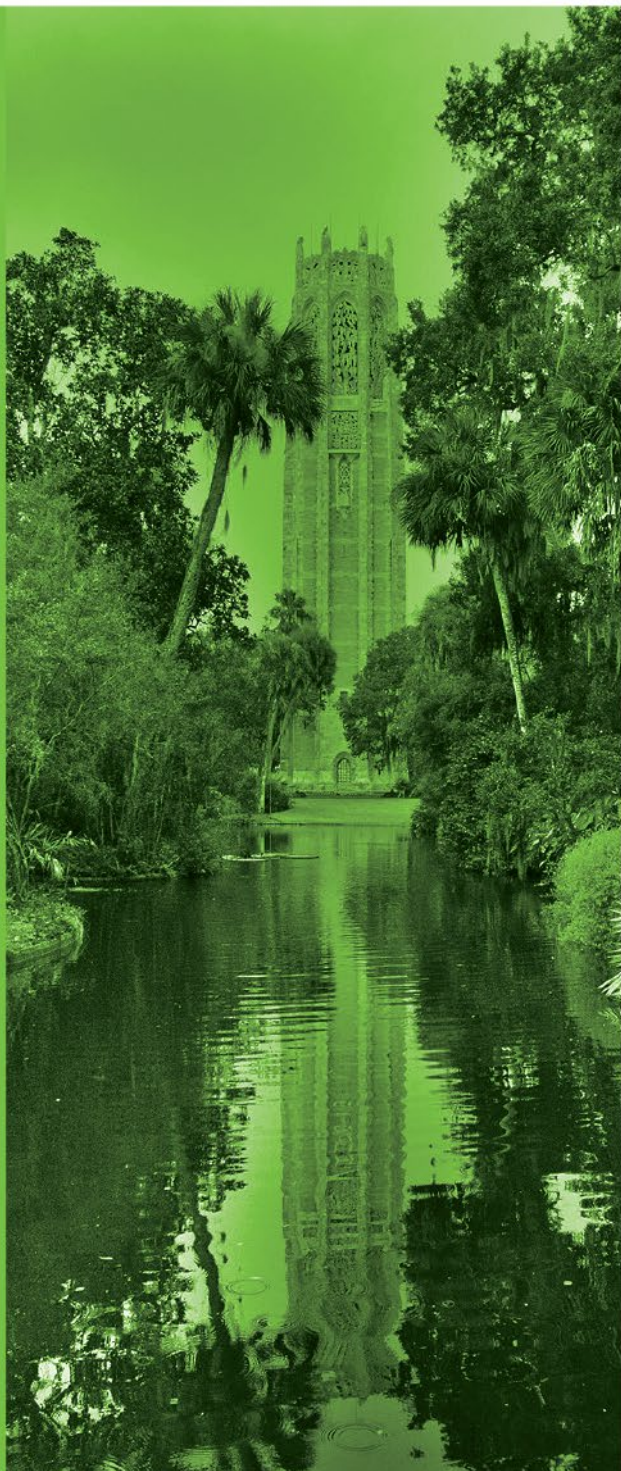


INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION

DATA & ANALYSIS
Draft #2: April 2025



PROSPER 2050

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the Intergovernmental Coordination Element is to ensure effective coordination between Polk County and various regional, state, and federal agencies, municipalities, special districts, and neighboring jurisdictions. The County utilizes numerous programs to implement its Comprehensive Plan and address the growing demands on its services and public infrastructure. Effective coordination is essential to manage growth in an orderly manner and to provide necessary services to current and future residents. The data and analysis section of this Element guides the future implementation of programs, grants, and assistance.

INVENTORY & ANALYSIS

To ensure adequate service provision within the County, Polk County coordinates with multiple agencies, municipalities, neighboring counties, and regional and state agencies. This section outlines the mechanisms for coordination with private entities and governmental agencies at various levels.

MAJOR INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION EFFORTS

Annexation/Joint Planning

Interlocal Service Boundary Agreements (ISBAs) and Joint Planning Agreements (JPAs) can enhance coordination between Polk County and its municipalities. With 17 municipalities in Polk County (13 cities, three towns, and one village), allocating roles and responsibilities is crucial for effective and efficient growth. JPAs, which are covered under Chapter 163 of the Florida Statutes, are typically used to address land use planning and design standards between jurisdictions. ISBAs, which are defined under Chapter 171 of Florida Statutes, allow for the parties to go a step further by addressing the provision of services and annexations. Both are effective tools in managing growth in environments with multiple jurisdictions.

Currently, only two municipalities have joint agreements with the County: the City of Auburndale and the City of Lakeland. The agreement with Auburndale began in 2019 and has been renewed several times, with the latest three-year renewal occurring in 2024. This agreement established a Joint Planning Area, created a desired development pattern for the area, and set common land development regulations. Lakeland established the Lakeland Planning Area as a boundary that the City envisions may be served by City facilities and utilities in the future. As communities continue to grow, the County and its municipalities should consider creating additional ISBAs or JPAs to clearly define roles and responsibilities within their respective areas.

Community Redevelopment

Polk County has 12 community redevelopment districts within its boundaries. Two are in the unincorporated area, and ten are within municipalities. Community Redevelopment Areas are tools for addressing slum and blight, established pursuant to Florida State Statutes Chapter 163, Part III. A Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) may address issues such as substandard or inadequate structures, a shortage of affordable housing, inadequate infrastructure, insufficient roadways, and

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economic vitality. Typically, these community redevelopment districts have a set timeframe, though extensions may be requested if the goals of the community redevelopment plan have not been achieved. For additional information on CRAs, please refer to the Economic Development Element.

Eloise Community Redevelopment Area

The Eloise Community Redevelopment Area was established in 1999 to address the community's basic needs such as wastewater infrastructure, housing rehabilitation, adequate water pressure, paved streets, and street lighting. The County has made significant efforts to improve the infrastructure of the Eloise community. The priorities of the Community Redevelopment Area have now shifted towards improving the economic vitality in the area. This includes improving access to employment centers, attracting businesses, and enhancing local housing conditions. The current timeframe for the Community Redevelopment Area will expire in 2030.

Harden/Parkway Community Redevelopment Area

The Harden/Parkway Community Redevelopment Area was created to eliminate the blight on the area's transportation system. The area of the Harden/Parkway Community Redevelopment Area includes areas that are located within the City of Lakeland and unincorporated Polk County. Established in 2004, the priorities of the plan were to relieve the blighted conditions, encourage the economic potential of the area, and provide funding for necessary transportation improvements. The Harden/Parkway Community Redevelopment Area is set to expire in 2044.

Emergency Services

Polk County coordinates emergency services with its municipalities to support first responder needs and activities. The cities of Lakeland, Lake Alfred, and Bartow all have their own police and fire departments. However, the cities still coordinate with the Polk County Sheriff's Office and emergency services to provide the best care for its residents. As shown in **Table ICE 1**, there is an existing interlocal agreement for emergency services between Polk County, all 17 municipalities within the County, and Florida Polytechnic University. Continuing coordination remains critical to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of county and city residents.

Natural Resource Protection

Polk County has many natural resources that require coordination from various groups to maintain and improve the environmental quality. The County has conservation areas that are managed by others such as the U.S. Air Force, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD), the Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Commission, and the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD).

As one of two counties that house the Avon Park Air Force Range, continual coordination with the U.S. Air Force is vital. The Air Force range is home to an environmental stewardship program dedicated to safeguarding unique plant and animal habitats. The initiative focuses on the study and protection of rare plants and endangered species inhabiting the range.

The Green Swamp spans 560,000 acres and encompass a diverse range of ecosystems, including cypress swamps, hardwood forests, marshes, pine flatwoods, and sandhills. The swamp is located within Polk, Lake, Sumter, Hernando, and Pasco Counties. The Green Swamp is considered an Area of Critical State Concern. Therefore, FloridaCommerce reviews all local development projects

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within the Area of Critical State Concern and may appeal to the Florida Land and Water Adjudicatory Commission any local development orders that are inconsistent with state guidelines and local comprehensive plans and regulations. Additionally, FloridaCommerce reviews and approves amendments to local comprehensive plans and land development regulations within the area.

Since 1999, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and SFWMD continue to restore the Kissimmee River's surrounding ecosystem. Continuing coordination between these organizations and the County is vital in managing preservation and conserving areas within the County.

Concerned about the loss of native habitat, a citizen grassroots effort in the early 1990s promoted the funding of an environmental lands acquisition and management program to protect water, wildlife, and wilderness resources. At the request of this citizen's initiative, the Polk County Board of County Commissioners placed a referendum question to the public to ask if they would agree to levy a tax upon themselves to fund a local environmental lands program. In November of 1994, a majority voted in favor of this concept, which resulted in the formation of the County's original environmental land acquisition and management program. This original levy expired in 2015.

In November of 2022, Polk County voters approved a new referendum for a property tax to generate funds for lands purchases over a 20-year period. The proposal drew support from 58.4% of voters. The purpose of this Environmental Lands Program is to acquire, preserve, protect, manage and restore endangered and environmentally sensitive lands, water resources, and important wildlife habitat as part of Polk County conservation. Acquired properties may be used for passive outdoor recreational purposes provided that such uses will not disturb or degrade the environmental quality for which the site was acquired.

Polk County Environmental Lands Ordinances provide the legal framework from which the Environmental Lands Program must operate. An advisory committee was established to review and recommend land easements and purchases to the Board. The Conservation Land Acquisition Selection Advisory Committee (CLASAC) provides recommendations for sites nominated to be acquired through the Environmental Lands Program. The lay board assists the County Commission in determining the acquisition of land in accordance with Ordinance 22-050.

Public Housing (Housing Authority)

Polk County's Housing and Neighborhood Development division administers state and federal funds for affordable housing projects, grants, and other partnerships. The division also coordinates with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and Florida Housing Finance Corporation. In the 2022-2023 calendar year, the Department used over \$8 million in federal and state funds to improve 460 housing units. Continuous coordination between the County, state, and federal agencies will be important to allocate funds to increase affordable housing.

Public School Facilities

In 2013, Polk County entered into an Interlocal Agreement for Public School Facilities Planning with 15 of its municipalities. The Village of Highland Park and the Town of Hillcrest Heights were exempt from this agreement. Polk County, the municipalities, and the school board are required to have this agreement pursuant to Florida Statutes Sections 163.01, 163.31777(1), and 1013.33. The benefits of this agreement include better coordination of new schools with land development,

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greater efficiency by placing schools near existing and planned roads, utilities, and parks, improved student access and safety, and a better-defined urban form by designing schools as community focal points. Additionally, it promotes efficiency and convenience by co-locating schools with other community facilities, reduces pressures contributing to urban sprawl, and supports existing neighborhoods by rehabilitating and expanding existing schools. For additional information on public school facilities, please refer to the Public School Facilities Element.

Regional Planning

With Polk County being centrally located within the Florida peninsula and situated along the I-4 corridor, regional cooperation and coordination is a top priority as growth not only continues in Polk County but also along the corridor and region.

Central Florida Regional Planning Council

The Central Florida Regional Planning Council (CFRPC), created in 1974, consists of DeSoto, Hardee, Highlands, Okeechobee, and Polk counties and their 25 municipalities. The Planning Council maintains a U.S. Economic Development Administration Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), which serves as a regional blueprint to create a more diverse and stronger economy. The plan documents demographics, opportunity zones, investment areas, goal and objectives, and target industries.

South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD)

The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD), established in 1949, predates the 1972 Water Resources Act. The District covers 16 counties in South Florida, from Orlando to the Keys. SFWMD covers the eastern half of Polk County and is responsible for evaluating and managing water quality and water supply, flood protection, and natural systems. The Florida Everglades restoration is the largest initiative that the SFWMD is working on. However, within the Polk County's Boundary, the SFWMD is also working on restoring the Kissimmee River and its floodplain.

Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD)

The Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) covers 16 counties, including western and central Polk County. The SWFWMD was created to be the local sponsor of the "Four River Basins, Florida Project," which was a response after Hurricane Donna hit Florida in 1960. The district is responsible for regulating and managing water supply, flood protection, water quality, and natural systems. Each district is responsible for developing and maintaining a Regional Water Supply Plan (RWSP) which identify needs and recommend strategies for meeting future water demands of urban and agricultural uses, as well as the environment. The SWFWMD breaks the district into four planning regions (Northern, Tampa Bay, Heartland, and Southern) and each region has its own water supply plan. Polk County is included within the Heartland Planning Region regional water supply plan. The plan highlights areas where current water sources will not meet future demands and evaluates alternative water source options, including water conservation, needed to meet those demands.

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Transportation Planning Organization (TPO)

Effective coordination between the County and its 17 municipalities in relation to transportation planning and maintenance is essential in maintaining a high quality of life for residents. Established in 1977, the TPO is responsible for planning to meet short and long-term travel requirements within Polk County. The County and 17 municipalities have an interlocal agreement to provide for the division and distribution of proceeds stemming from a six-cent local option fuel tax. The tax revenue may be used to fund transportation expenditures. The Polk TPO is currently updating its Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and it is anticipated to be adopted by the end of 2025. The Transit Development Plan (TDP) is also be updated with an anticipated adoption date of no later than March of 2026.

Polk County is part of the Sun Coast Transportation Planning Alliance (SCTPA), which supports local, regional, and statewide projects to improve transportation access in the West Central Florida region. The SCTPA includes the counties of Hernando, Citrus, Hillsborough, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk, Sarasota, and Manatee. It provides a platform for coordinated transportation planning, prioritizing roadways, transit, and trail projects, while ensuring a consistent approach among member agencies. The SCTPA addresses transportation matters of regional importance brought by members of the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), the Florida Turnpike Enterprise, the Tampa Bay Area Regional Transit Authority (TBARTA), the Regional Planning Councils, or any of its subcommittees, and is empowered to make recommendations for the West Central Florida area.

Utility Agreements

Polk County Utilities provides services, such as wastewater collection/treatment and potable water distribution, to nearly 68,000 accounts in the unincorporated areas throughout the County. Many of the unincorporated areas immediately adjacent to its municipalities are served by the neighboring cities utilities or private utilities. Polk County has several Local Agreements (LA) for Utility Service Areas within the cities of Haines City, Bartow and Lakeland. In 2018, an Interlocal Agreement (ILA) was adopted between Polk County, the City of Lakeland, and the City of Bartow to establish a three-way potable water interconnect system. This facility allows potable water to flow between their respective water systems for emergency and reliability purposes. The ILA between the City of Haines City and the Tohopekalinga Water Authority, adopted in 2022, establishes that Haines City will provide water and wastewater services to Marion Creek Estates. Previously, Polk County coordinated with the City of Auburndale and the City of Lakeland to extend potable water and sewer services to existing urban developments, since the County was not in a financial position to provide these services independently.

In 2016, Polk County and 15 of its municipalities formed by the Polk Regional Water Cooperative (PRWC) collaboratively planned and developed conservation efforts, system interconnections, and new alternative water supply (AWS) sources. Managing a balance between growth and sustainable water use is essential to maintain the health and longevity of the County's water resources. Continued coordination among water and wastewater providers is key to ensuring that all areas of the County are adequately covered and maintaining the location of service lines. The County continues to coordinate with the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD), the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD), and the Florida Department of

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Environmental Protection (FDEP) to promote and regulate Best Management Practices for water quality. In 2020, the County collaborated with nearby counties and respective water districts to create the Central Florida Water Initiative and develop a regional water supply plan for Orange, Osceola, Polk, Seminole, and Southern Lake County. For more information regarding utilities, please refer to the Infrastructure Element.

Solid Waste

Polk County contracts with FCC Environmental, GFL Environmental, and Polk County Solid Waste for household waste collection. Polk County has one active landfill site in the North Central region of the County. Polk County discontinued its curbside recycling collection in October of 2024, citing rising costs of recycling and high degrees of contamination as primary reasons for this decision. The landfill continues to provide designated drop off containers for items that are typically recycled curbside, and the landfill continues to recycle concrete, yard trash, appliances, scrap metals, electronics, and household hazardous wastes.

Healthcare Infrastructure

Polk County has many health care providers including Lakeland Regional Health, Bay Care, Advent Health, Orlando Health, Watson Clinic, and Bond Clinic. These entities provide services to the general County population, including the most vulnerable populations within the community. According the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Polk County is underserved compared to national averages for healthcare infrastructure:

- Polk County has 2,170 people per healthcare provider, compared to the national average of 1,330 people per provider.
- Polk County has 2,820 people per dental provider, compared to the national average of 1,360 people per provider.
- Polk County has 830 people per behavioral health provider, compared to the national average of 320 people per provider.

Additionally, data from Feeding America indicates that there are 68,690 County residents that are classified as food insecure, which results in \$135,950,692 in healthcare costs per year.

According the Polk County Health Department, there are additional health-related challenges in the community despite ongoing efforts to improve outcomes. Obesity-related diseases, including heart disease, stroke, and diabetes, continue to worsen within the County. Polk County is in the 4th quartile for stroke deaths, hypertension hospitalizations, diabetes hospitalizations and emergency department visits, CLRD hospitalizations, asthma hospitalizations and emergency department visits, cervical cancer deaths, and prostate cancer incidence. Compounding the issues, 42% of respondents to a Health Department survey reported problems getting health care services. In an attempt to address these issues, the Health Department maintains a Community Health Improvement Plan with a horizon of 2030. The plan's top three priorities are access to health services, behavioral health, and chronic disease.

FORMAL AGREEMENT INVENTORY

As shown in Table ICE - 1, Polk County has utilized multiple intergovernmental cooperation mechanisms, such as interlocal agreements, to further its ability to serve its citizens. These mechanisms are described below in alphabetical order.

Table ICE 1 Formal Agreements Inventory

Type & Purpose of Agreement	Parties Involved in Agreement	Expiration Date (if provided)
Interlocal Agreement for first responder agency	Polk County &: • City of Auburndale • City of Bartow • City of Davenport • City of Eagle Lake • City of Fort Meade • City of Frostproof • City of Haines City • City of Lake Alfred • Town of Lake Hamilton • City of Lake Wales • City of Lakeland • City of Mulberry • City of Polk City • Town of Dundee • City of Winter Haven • Village of Highland Park • Town of Hillcrest Heights • Florida Polytechnic University	None (Renews until Terminated)

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Type & Purpose of Agreement	Parties Involved in Agreement	Expiration Date (if provided)
Interlocal Agreement for Polk Regional Water Cooperative	Polk County &: • City of Auburndale • City of Bartow • City of Davenport • City of Eagle Lake • City of Fort Meade • City of Frostproof • City of Haines City • City of Lake Alfred • Town of Lake Hamilton • City of Lake Wales • City of Lakeland • City of Mulberry • City of Polk City • Town of Dundee • City of Winter Haven • Village of Highland Park	None (Renews until Terminated)
Interlocal Agreement for public school facilities	Polk County &: • City of Auburndale • City of Bartow • City of Davenport • City of Eagle Lake • City of Fort Meade • City of Frostproof • City of Haines City • City of Lake Alfred • Town of Lake Hamilton • City of Lake Wales • City of Lakeland • City of Mulberry • City of Polk City • Town of Dundee • City of Winter Haven • Polk County School Board	None (Renews Yearly until Terminated)

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Type & Purpose of Agreement	Parties Involved in Agreement	Expiration Date (if provided)
Interlocal Agreement for the Transportation Planning Organization	Polk County &: - City of Auburndale - City of Bartow - City of Davenport - City of Eagle Lake - City of Fort Meade - City of Frostproof - City of Haines City - City of Lake Alfred - Town of Lake Hamilton - City of Lake Wales - City of Lakeland - City of Mulberry - City of Polk City - Town of Dundee - City of Winter Haven - FL Dept. of Transportation	None (Renews until Terminated)
Interlocal Agreement for Utility Service Area	Polk County &: - City of Haines City - Tohopekalgia Water Authority (independent special district)	None (Renews Yearly until Terminated)
Interlocal Agreement for Utility Service Area	Polk County &: City of Lakeland	None
Interlocal Agreement for water supply planning	Polk County &: City of Lake Wales	None (Ongoing until Terminated)
Joint Planning Agreement to direct future growth	Polk County &: City of Auburndale	2027

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS / RECOMMENDATIONS

As the area continues to grow, the County should consider the following findings which are the result of the community visioning process, and the data and analysis represented in this document.

1. **Municipality coordination:** At a minimum, it is recommended to maintain a system of regular coordination with all municipalities. This can include, but not be limited to, regular meetings, Joint Planning Agreements, or Interlocal Service Boundary Agreements. Establishing Joint Planning Agreements (JPAs) with all municipalities will enable Polk County to effectively coordinate land use and growth management in areas adjacent to these municipalities. These agreements would streamline zoning, annexation policies, and infrastructure planning, ensuring that development is consistent with and aligns with the visions of both the municipalities and the County. JPAs can also reduce conflicts over jurisdictional boundaries and promote the sharing of resources, benefiting both the municipalities and the County.
2. **Strengthen transportation coordination with Polk TPO:** Working closely with the Polk TPO is essential for Polk County's vision of a connected transportation network. Given Polk County's attractiveness for trucking and distribution, and the ongoing growth opportunities, it is vital to coordinate efforts to ensure safety and infrastructure for all transportation users. The potential expansion and connectivity of Brightline and SunRail further emphasize the need for continuous coordination.
3. **Formalize a policy for healthcare coordination:** Access to healthcare services will be vital as the County continues to urbanize. While healthcare providers are typically private entities, there is value in coordination with these important community partners to serve the future population. This coordination can focus on land use and transportation planning to ensure adequate sites for future facilities and multimodal transportation options for all members of the community.