CITY OF CHIEFLAND

COMPETITIVE FLORIDA ASSET MAPPING REPORT

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
DIVISION OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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# Acknowledgements

The Department of Economic Opportunity would like to thank the City of Chiefland and all community members and state agency partners for their enthusiastic participation in the community asset mapping exercise. For a complete list of all individuals who participated, see Appendix B.
Introduction

The City of Chiefland is a partner community in the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity’s Competitive Florida Partnership Program. Competitive Florida helps communities map their strengths and identify what makes them unique. Communities then target economic development opportunities and improvements that fit within their character. The recommendations included in this report were developed through an asset mapping exercise, an integral part of the Competitive Florida Partnership. On March 12, 2015, a team of experts from state and regional agencies partnered with community leaders to visit the unique assets in Chiefland. In addition, the teams brainstormed potential opportunities to expand upon the assets in ways that may further economic and community development in the community. Building on the assets already present within the town is a strategy to minimize the amount of outside resources needed to achieve the community’s goals, while also embracing and staying true to those characteristics that make the community unique.

Economic development can generally be defined as long-term actions of policy makers and communities that promote a high and rising standard of living and economic health of a specific area. These are the actions that a community can take to incrementally improve itself, which can lead to the attraction of residents and increase business attraction, retention, and expansion. A report by the North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center states that in small towns, community development is economic development. It goes on to say, “Capacity-building and other strategies typically associated with community development are analogous with actions designed to promote economic outcomes in rural areas.” The recommendations in this report are centered on the fifteen principles outlined in the Competitive Florida Partnership Program to make communities more competitive.

We ask our readers to please bear in mind:

Many of the observations and recommendations in this resource were developed by agency and regional representatives who may lack the local knowledge of past projects, current challenges, and future plans. These recommendations are meant to provide a snapshot of the community from individuals with an outside perspective. Those who know the City of Chiefland best may find some recommendations more feasible or appropriate for the community than others, but the hope is to provide thoughts to help guide those closest to the community in the creation of a local economic development action plan.
Top Assets Identified

Assets are existing local resources that the community can build upon to strengthen the local economy. The asset mapping teams pointed to the following list of places, sites, groups, and institutions as the top assets in the community.

**Chiefland Industrial Park**  
*S.E. 4th St.*
The City of Chiefland has a 20-acre industrial park on the southern side of the city. The City-owned industrial park has been in existence since approximately 1980 and provides water, sewer, and electric services, and there is capacity to expand and grow as demands increase. The City works closely with prospective tenants to accommodate their needs, such as leasing existing industrial structures or developing new structures.

**White Farms**  
*U.S. Highway 19/98*  
White Farms is an agricultural operation located on the southern side of the City. The White family previously raised horses and operated a dairy farm, and in 2006, the White Farms property was annexed into the City. A private airport that includes a single runway for small planes and a hangar for storage is also located on the property, which may be a potential future asset to the property owners and the City. However, current uses of the property continue to be primarily agricultural.

**Chiefland Golf and Country Club**  
*9650 N.W. 115th St.*  
The Chiefland Golf and Country Club is one of only two golf courses in Levy County. It is a full service facility with 18 holes, open to the public, and offers annual tournaments and leagues at different times of the year. Coupled with the many other parks and trails in Chiefland, it adds to the diverse list of outdoor recreational opportunities the City and region has to offer to visitors and residents.

**Tillis Farms**  
*2540 N.W. 14th St.*  
Tillis Farms, also known as the Watermelon Farm, produces and packages watermelons for distribution to stores and supermarkets throughout the State of Florida and the United States. The Farm is approximately 5,000 acres in size and employs 15 full-time workers, as well as several seasonal workers. There is currently no central sewer or potable water on the property; however, the City or a developer can provide a connection to the municipal system should there be any development in the future.
Dakotah Winery
14365 U.S. Highway 19
The Dakotah Winery and Vineyards is a wonderful, one of a kind experience on the back roads of Florida. It was established by Rob Rittgers and his father, Max Rittgers, in 1985 with 200 Muscadine grape vines. Today, Dakotah Winery is a 12-acre working farm with more than 6,000 grape vines and features picnic tables shaded by grape vines on arbors, ponds populated with families of koi fish, a prolific wood duck sanctuary, a museum, and a retail store. The Dakotah Winery is a sustainable farm, using windmills and solar panels to supplement the energy needs of the vineyard and winery. One of the antique windmills pumps water for the winery pond and the winery also has geese and sheep wandering around to eat the weeds. The farm uses no pesticides and the winery and pond are designated as an Audubon bird sanctuary. Dakotah has an attractive wine-tasting room and samples are served daily. Like many Florida wineries, Dakotah has a nice selection of wines that include five table wines, a Florida port, and a nonalcoholic juice made from Muscadine grapes. In addition to wine, there is a selection of accessories, T-shirts, salad dressings, sauces, jams, and jellies. The roof of the wine cellar serves as a patio shaded by awnings and blooming flowers, and is a great place to watch the pond and its animal life.

Quality Inn
1125 North Young Blvd.
The Quality Inn is one of three hotel options in Chiefland. It has 50 rooms available and is at or near full capacity during the spring months and during special events, such as the Watermelon Festival and the Tee-ball State Championship. It offers amenities such as continental breakfast, an outdoor pool, and a meeting facility.

Chiefland RV Park
316 N.W. 11th Ave.
The Chiefland RV Park offers sites for long-term residents as well as overnight camping. The RV campground sites are large and include picnic tables at each of the sites. There are approximately 60 sites within the park with ample room between spaces. The park allows pets and has water, sewer, and electrical hookups for all sites. During the winter season, the site is mostly at full occupancy and drops off during the summer. The park has many returning customers, and is adjacent to the Nature Coast Trail.

Days Inn
809 NW 21st Ave.
The Days Inn is the largest hotel option in Chiefland, with a total of 60 rooms. It has been recently remodeled and offers modern, convenient services as well as continental breakfast, laundry and pool. The Days Inn operates at or near full capacity during the spring months and during special events, such as the Watermelon Festival and the Tee-Ball State Championship.
Chiefland Farmers’ Flea Market
1206 North Young Boulevard (U.S. Highway 19)
The Chiefland Farmers’ Flea Market is a very active and successful open vendor market. The Flea Market is open Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, and stays very busy though the weekend. The market offers many things from farm fresh produce and food located in small mom and pop stores, to antiques and tools. The Flea Market hosts outdoor and indoor vendors, at both permanent and transient installations. The Flea Market draws people from all over the tri-county area. A recreational vehicle (RV) park and campground is located on site.

Historic Train Depot
23 S.E. 2nd Ave.
The historic Chiefland Train Depot is a significant community asset because the depot building provides both a historic connection with past and various amenities to the community today. The Depot currently acts as the office for the local Chamber of Commerce and serves as the City’s historic train museum, with dozens of original pictures and artifacts on display that celebrate Chiefland’s history. The depot is a stop along the Nature Coast State Trail and offers large, open grounds and picnic areas for special events and festivals, allowing for it to serve as the community’s farmers market as well as a Nature Coast Trailhead.

Levy County Quilt Museum
11050 NW 10 Ave.
In addition to the natural and historic resources located in and around the City of Chiefland, there is also the Levy County Quilt Museum. Founded in 1986, the museum is the only one of its kind in the State of Florida. The Museum features quilts that exhibit the artistry and craftsmanship well-known in quilt makers and highlights the cultural significance of this art. There are many quilts for sale, including some hand-quilted, machine-quilted, and hand-tied. Also in the museum, there are craft items made by locals. The museum is a non-profit organization, charging no admission fees to visitors.
Chiefland Theater (Suwanee Valley Players Community Theater)
25 East Park Ave.
The Chiefland Theater serves Dixie, Levy, and Gilchrist counties, with a mission of bringing quality live entertainment to the tri-county area and to educate the community in the fine art of theater. The facility has experienced challenges with support; however, the theater is currently undergoing improvements.

Proposed Suwanee River Community Hospital
County Road 320
The proposed Suwanee River Community Hospital is poised to be an important asset to the community. The hospital is designed to serve the entire tri-county region, which includes Levy County, Dixie County, and Gilchrist County, and will be located in the City of Chiefland near the Wal-Mart location. The Suwanee River Community Hospital is proposed to be a two-wing hospital with 14 rooms in each wing, 28 rooms total. The hospital entity has already obtained its Certificate of Need from the Florida Agency for Health Care Administration in preparation for its construction, which is anticipated to begin in 2015. The Hospital will bring healthcare industry jobs and attract supporting businesses (e.g. other medical industry services, freight, service industry, etc.) to the City.

Proposed Jack Wilkinson Central Florida College Campus
The proposed Jack Wilkinson Central Florida College can be an important asset to the community in conjunction with the hospital. In June 2014, the college was notified that $4.3 million dollars in funding for the Levy Campus was approved by the Florida Legislature for the first phase of construction. The existing Levy Campus serves more than 3,000 students from Levy, Dixie, and Gilchrist counties taking college credit, testing, continuing education, and adult education classes. It is expected that the expansion of programs and enrollment with emphasis on health care and high-tech specialties will initially generate $15 million a year in new economic impact for the area. Additional funds have been requested for construction and equipment in 2015-2017.
**U.S. Highway 19/98**

U.S. Highway 19/98 is the main arterial north-south corridor that traverses through the City. The Highway is a four-lane divided roadway, with a center dividing median which includes a dedicated left turn lane along the route through the City. The Highway connects major urban areas of Tallahassee to the north, with St Petersburg to the south. Highway 19/98 is a Florida Strategic Intermodal System (SIS) Highway, which is a roadway of statewide and interregional significance and contains all forms of transportation for moving both people and goods, including linkages that provide for smooth and efficient transfers between modes and major roadways. The highway connects I-10 to the north with the Suncoast Parkway to the south, and is proximal to I-75 in Pasco County.

**U.S. Alternate Highway 27**

U.S. Alternate Highway 27 is an arterial east-west corridor that terminates at U.S. Highway 19/98 within the City, near the Chiefland High School. The Highway is a four-lane divided roadway and connects Chiefland to Williston and Ocala to the east, where there is a direct connection to I-75. These roadways are major travel routes and provide convenient access for tourism and businesses throughout the state. Given the City’s proximity to these major thoroughfares, the City has opportunity to advance its economic growth and tourism.

**State Route 129**

State Route Highway 129 is another major arterial east-west corridor that terminates at U.S. Highway 19/98 within the City. The Highway is a two-lane roadway that connects Chiefland to the City of Gainesville, which is the closest major urban area to the northeast and is approximately a 30 minute drive by car from Chiefland. Many Chiefland residents work in Gainesville, making this an important infrastructure and economic connection to the City.
Nature Coast State Trail, Trailhead

The City of Chiefland boasts one of the most unique walking and biking trails in the state. As a former rail line, the Nature Coast State Trail is one of the Sunshine State's best-kept trail secrets. Formerly the Nature Coast Greenway, the Nature Coast Trail connects five communities—Cross City, Old Town, Fanning Springs, Trenton, and Chiefland—along a T-shaped, 32-mile corridor. Maintained by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the asphalt path provides enough trailheads, pavilions, and services to ease journeys of any length. Most of the trail parallels US 19 and State Road 26 and is embedded in an agricultural landscape. Trailheads are located within the five linked rural communities, making the trail easily accessible for local use, in addition to being close to accommodations, restaurants, and other recreational opportunities. The Nature Coast Trail provides a scenic experience for runners, walkers, and bikers. Equestrian riders can enjoy trails that parallel some portions of the paved trail. Currently, designated parking for equestrians can be found at the Fanning Springs and Old Town trailheads.

Several significant land and water resources exist in the vicinity of the Nature Coast Trail, including: Suwannee River, Fanning Springs, Big Bend Seagrasses Aquatic Preserve, Manatee Springs State Park, the City of Hawkinsville Underwater Archaeological Preserve, Andrews Wildlife Management Area, Cedar Key Scrub State Reserve, Waccasassa Bay State Preserve, Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge, Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge, Jena Wildlife Management Area, Gulf Hammock Wildlife Management Area, and Goethe State Forest. Other public lands are found to the west and south of the Nature Coast Trail, including the Fanning Springs State Park, Manatee Springs State Park, and Andrews Wildlife Management Area. Between Trenton and Cross City, to the north of Fanning Springs, the trail crosses the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail. The Nature Coast Trail is truly a remarkable asset to the City of Chiefland.

Buie Park

1102 S.W. 5th St.

The City of Chiefland’s Eddie Buie Park is a 10-acre city park. This park has a playground, baseball field, basketball court, picnic tables, pavilion, restrooms, and concession stand. The park is very well cared for, is a well-frequented local destination, and boasts the May Day parade held by Chiefland residents. The City has grant funding to construct a trail system at the park.
**Strickland Park Sporting Complex**  
2340 N.W. Old Fanning Rd  
One of the City of Chiefland’s many parks is Strickland Park Sporting Complex. It is a newer, full-facility park and has baseball fields, soccer fields, basketball court, concession stand, restrooms, pavilions, and playground equipment. Strickland Park is a modern park facility with lighted fields and has youth and adult league baseball games. The park is conveniently located near the Nature Coast Trail and the City’s charter school.

**Delma Locke Park**  
826 N.W. 4th Dr.  
The City of Chiefland’s Delma Locke Park is the home of the skate park and is very popular among students. The park has a playground and many benches that are utilized by lunch time visitors. The park is located next to the High School, with access to the Nature Coast Trail. The Future Farmers of America Agricultural Building is located on site.

**Manatee Springs State Park**  
Six miles west of Chiefland on State Road 320, off U.S. Highway 19  
The City of Chiefland is located near one of the most pristine natural resources in northwest Florida. Manatee Spring is a first magnitude spring that flows directly into the Suwannee River by way of a short run (though it is the longest spring run feeding the Suwannee River). Present are swamps and hardwood wetlands with many sinkhole ponds, including one with a cave 90 feet below the ground that connects to a popular divers' destination known as the catfish hotel. Manatee Springs produces an average of 100 million gallons of clear, cool water daily. In winter, West Indian manatees swim upriver to the warmer waters of the springs. Popular for snorkeling and scuba diving, the headwaters of the spring are also a great spot for swimming. Activities include hiking, biking, kayaking, canoeing, as well as scuba diving, swimming, snorkeling, and wildlife viewing. Some of the amenities are a floating dock, boardwalk, eight miles of wooded off-road trails, picnic pavilions, and full camping facilities. The spring run forms a sparkling stream that meanders through hardwood wetlands to the Suwannee River. Canoeing and kayaking are also available year round. The park boasts a full-facility campground that is surrounded by red oak woods.
**Additional Assets**

**Vacant property, For Sale** (Former location of Mangrove Outfitters)

*1109 N Young Blvd. (U.S. 19)*

Mangrove Outfitters is equipped with electric, sewer, and water. The site is in an active location next to the Quality Inn and has easy access to U.S. Highway 19/98 in the commercial area of the City. There is discussion that the site may be redeveloped into a walk-in clinic, which would be a great asset to the community.

**Vacant Property, For Sale** (Former location of Central Florida Electric Cooperative Warehouse)

*315 N.W. 11th Ave.*

The Central Florida Electric Cooperative Warehouse commercial property was formerly a drive-through facility and warehouse. Currently, the site does not have access to central water or sewer; however, a connection would be possible since it is located within the City. The property could be reused or redeveloped.

**Vacant Property** (Former location of Southend Flea Market)

*500 South Main St. (U.S. Highway 19/98)*

The Southend Flea Market has been vacant since 2011, with the remainder of the property undeveloped. The site has many natural amenities, such as beautiful oak trees and open vistas. It also has public facilities, including water, sewer, and electric, and has the advantage of being located on U.S. Highway 19/98, in the City with excellent transportation access.

**Vacant Property** (Former location of Perkins State Bank)

*1604 North Young Blvd. (U.S. Highway 19/98)*

The Perkins State Bank property is approximately 5.8 acres. The vacant bank building is in good condition and has public facilities available, such as water, sewer, and electric. The property has the advantage of being located in the City on the northern portion of U.S. Highway 19/98 with good access in a growing commercial district.

**Vacant Property** (Former location of Yum Yum Ice Cream Shop)

*307 South Main St. (U.S. Highway 19/98)*

The Yum Yum Ice Cream Shop commercial property was formerly a popular ice cream shop. The property is located near the trailhead of the Nature Coast Trail and is close to the Historic Depot and the Greenway Sub Shop. The property has public facilities available, such as water, sewer, and electric, and has the potential to be reused or redeveloped. The site has the advantage of being located adjacent to the Depot, Nature Coast Trail Head, and with frontage on U.S. 19/98.

**Vacant Property** (Former location of Greenway Sub Shop)

*221 South Main St. (U.S. Highway 19/98)*

The Greenway Sub Shop commercial property was formerly a sandwich shop. The property is located directly at the trailhead of the Nature Coast Trail and is adjacent to the Historic Train Depot. The property has public
facilities available, such as water, sewer, and electric, and has the potential to be reused or redeveloped. The site has the advantage of being located adjacent to the Depot, Nature Coast Trailhead, and with frontage on U.S. 19/98. This property is very unique in that it is a triangular-shaped building constructed around the 1950s and is situated between the old railroad right of way (now the trail) and Highway 19/98.

**Vacant Property** (Former location of Huddle House)

**1402 North Young Blvd. (U.S. Highway 19/98)**

The Huddle House commercial property was formerly a 24-hour restaurant that closed approximately eight months ago. The property has public facilities available, such as water, sewer, and electric, and has the potential to be reused or redeveloped. The site has the advantage of being located on U.S. 19/98 along a busy and thriving commercial corridor.

**Vacant Property** (Former location of Fun 4 Kids Day Care)

**2631 North Young Blvd. (U.S. Highway 19/98)**

The former day care property includes access to public facilities such as water, sewer, and electric and has the potential to be redeveloped as a commercial property. The site has the advantage of being located on U.S. 19/98 along a growing commercial corridor.

**Vacant Property** (Former location of Go Cart Track)

**1571 N.W. 25th St.**

The Go Cart Track commercial property was formerly a private recreational facility. The property still has an asphalt track and an on-site holding pond, and could possibly be redeveloped as another recreational facility.

**Vacant Property** (Former location of Sav-A-Ton Gas Station)

**1605 North Young Blvd. (U.S. Highway 19/98)**

The gas station commercial property was formerly a convenience store and gasoline station. The property has been vacant since approximately 2002, and would most likely need to be redeveloped. The property has public facilities available, such as water, sewer, and electric, and has the advantage of being located on U.S. 19/98 in a busy, growing commercial corridor.
Recommendations

Recognizing the assets available within the community, the following recommendations look to capitalize on existing opportunities and identify additional opportunities.

Continue to embrace agricultural industry.
Currently, the City hosts an annual Watermelon Festival and Christmas Festival. But since losing the Tee-Ball State Championship tournament recently, there is one less large event to bring people to the City of Chiefland. Chiefland has strong ties to agriculture that go beyond watermelons. In addition to this, Chiefland Middle School/High School has an active Future Farmers of America (FFA) club. The Suwanee River Youth Livestock Show and Sale, which includes Dixie, Gilchrist, and Levy counties, has for 60 years maintained a mission “… to instill in the youth participants, an appreciation and basic knowledge of the agricultural industry that is still a major economic and cultural influence in North Central Florida.” One option to consider may be developing and planning festivals to coincide with other agricultural seasons, similar to the watermelon. This would help to feature the City’s agricultural heritage as well as being an attractor for visitors to the City. Another option that other regions in the state participate in is annual farm tours. These tours can have the ability to raise awareness and increase and/or maintain interest in the agriculture industry, and could even spur and increase agriculture-related businesses in the area while also continuing to recognize and celebrate the agricultural history of Chiefland.

The strength of the agriculture industry in Chiefland and Levy County, combined with the local education resources and amenities, such as the industrial park, may provide opportunities to attract or foster business development in other agriculture-related industries such as value-added products and food manufacturing.

One partner that is already active in the County’s 4-H program and may be a valuable resource in further embracing the agricultural industry in the area is the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) Levy County Extension. Although it is located in Bronson, it stands to serve the county as a whole, whether working with commercial agriculture, families, or students.

Continue to grow network of area businesses.
The Greater Chiefland Area Chamber of Commerce is the main business networking entity for the City and boasts a membership of more than 100 businesses, advocacy groups, and civic organizations. This group is responsible for hosting the City’s annual Watermelon and Christmas festivals and is located in the Train Depot Museum. Membership benefits in the Chamber include exposure and marketing opportunities, as well as civic engagement. Business owners and residents have expressed the desire for additional coordination between the
Chamber and other networking groups. Some local business owners have stated that “people just don’t know we’re here.” Since the Greater Chiefland Area Chamber is the major business networking entity, most of the business community is already familiar to them. The Chamber maintains a website that includes member businesses and agencies, as well as a calendar of events, and contact information. In partnership with the Chamber, the City could host quarterly business fairs, and/or hold quarterly meetings; including job fairs with workforce entities such as CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion. Another way to showcase businesses to the area may be a local awards competition, including feature awards such as Best Burger, Best Cup of Coffee, Best A/C Repair, Best Customer Service, etc. It could also be combined with a social media campaign to get local residents and patrons involved. Citizens and patrons vote for the “best” businesses in the category. This provides recognition for the businesses locally, and may also expand recognition regionally. In some cases, businesses such as restaurants may join together to group similar offerings in the form events such as chili cook-offs. The Chamber may also want to consider developing a social media presence, such as a Facebook page or Twitter account, to keep patrons updated on events in Chiefland as well as the Chamber itself, including informing the community of the many services that the Chamber offers.

**Expand existing efforts to market eco-tourism opportunities in the area.**

The City of Chiefland is an area that is abundant in natural resources. The Nature Coast Trail has trailheads in the cities of Trenton and Cross City, as well as a junction in Fanning Springs. There are plans to extend the trail east from Trenton to the City of Newberry as funding becomes available. Overall, usership of the trail has increased since opening in Chiefland. There is also a high concentration of springs in the area as well as the Suwannee River, drawing in visitors from around the world to see the geological and natural beauty. Helping to grow businesses that cater to bicyclists, swimmers/divers, paddlers, and hikers may allow users from outside of the City an easier time when trying to experience these assets. It would also provide an opportunity for local businesses to come to the area, and even subsequently provide other demands in education. This could include the addition of an entire nature-based curriculum. As College of Central Florida grows and expands, adding nature-based or natural resource-based certifications and programs could provide a unique educational opportunity for Chiefland.

**Identify additional events to promote the City and region.**

Recognizing the City of Chiefland’s close proximity to Manatee Springs, a festival that highlights and celebrates the manatee as an integral part of Florida wildlife could serve as a mechanism to attract visitors, as well as increase awareness and provide educational opportunities for the community and visitors alike. Guidance on this might be taken from nearby Crystal River, which hosts an annual festival in honor of the manatee, “its most cherished symbol.” A partner in this may be the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) as an...
effort to both highlight the Florida State Park system, while also drawing attention to the many amenities that park visitors can find in nearby Chiefland.

The City of Chiefland also has a unique asset in the Levy County Quilt Museum. This destination serves in an unofficial capacity as the Levy County Tourist Center, featuring a quilted map depicting several of the tourist destinations around Levy County. The museum hosts its annual quilt show the day after Thanksgiving. Being the only quilt museum in Florida provides advantages to the City of Chiefland to cater to quilters from all over. In partnership the Quilt Museum, Chiefland may want to consider building upon the museum’s current annual event, or planning a separate event such as an expo for quilters to come to the area.

The Dakotah Winery – one of only six wineries in North Central Florida - offers a unique tourism experience. A collaboration with the other wineries in the area (Tangled Oaks – Palatka, Bluefield Estates – Gainesville, Island Grove – Ocala, Royal Manor – Interlachen, Log Cabin – Satsuma) could create the opportunity for a regional wine tour. There could be potential for Fresh from Florida, with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, to be a part of the event to showcase the North Central Florida wine industry.

Once new annual festivals and events are designed, consideration should be given to the appropriate dates on which they should be held. Outdoor festivals, for example, might be scheduled to occur at times of the year when the weather is expected to be conducive. The City might also consider establishing relative dates for annual events to ensure that they fall on the same day of the week every year. In other words, the City might hold an annual Quilt Festival during the first weekend of a given month rather than set numerical dates. In addition to ensuring consistency from year to year, this will ensure that marketing materials do not become outdated and can therefore be economically reused.

**Seek to expand lodging accommodations.**

Chiefland currently has two major hotels, the Days Inn with 60 rooms and the Quality Inn with 58 rooms. These accommodation facilities are strong assets, as they provide employment and attract external tourism revenue. The hotels have a very high occupancy rate for the more than half the year. In previous years, Chiefland hosted the state Tee-Ball Championships, but the tournament has relocated due to a lack of lodging availability. The completion of the College of Central Florida Jack Wilkinson campus, as well as the potential Suwanee River Community Hospital, may further increase demands on lodging. The City may want to partner with the Chamber of Commerce or the Nature Coast Business Development Council to develop a strategy for expanding existing lodging as well as attracting new lodging accommodations.
**Link educational and workforce opportunities.**
The City of Chiefland has great potential for integrating its many educational assets. Chiefland Middle School and High School are housed together but are separate schools with ratings of “A” and “B,” respectively. One of the highlights is the school’s very active FFA program. With such high ratings, the middle/high school is a direct catalyst for continuing post-secondary educational opportunities. The expansion of the College of Central Florida-Levy campus (into the Jack Wilkinson Central College of Florida campus) allows more opportunities to support demand for post-secondary educational opportunities. The college currently offers some post-secondary certificates, associate degrees, and Bachelor’s degrees in a limited number of areas, including areas in healthcare and agriculture. The Levy campus consistently operates at capacity for course offerings. As other occupations become more in-demand, there could be an increase in opportunities to craft educational programs to further meet those needs. Once the hospital opens, more occupational opportunities may be discovered or expanded. The College of Central Florida as well as Santa Fe College maintain agreements for dual enrollment with the high school. These relationships should be maintained and encouraged. Additionally, the State University System of Florida’s 2+2 Pathways to Success Program guarantees admission into any of the State’s four year institutions upon completion at a two year institution.

**Add vacant sites to regional and State economic development and location databases.**
Levy County, and subsequently Chiefland, is included in two major economic development agencies/organizations: the North Florida Economic Development partnership (NFEDP) and the Nature Coast Business Development Council. Among other things, these agencies assist with helping to connect local governments to businesses that are looking to expand or locate to an area. Site selection services include access to site selector events put on by NFEDP and scholarships for economic development representatives to attend economic development events and trade shows. They allow local governments to showcase and provide information about government and privately-owned parcels of land and available buildings where businesses may potentially locate. NFEDP and Nature Coast Business Development Council (BDC) maintains a database of available sites for development. The Nature Coast BDC has links to the NFEDP website. Enterprise Florida, Inc. (EFI) is the State of Florida’s public-private economic development entity that also maintains a statewide database. However, only sites that are 10,000 square feet or 10 acres or larger are eligible to be included in the EFI database. There may be a limited number of sites that qualify for this database, but this database is a good resource to have as sites become available. The City should include any available sites in the NFEDP database as well as with the Nature Coast BDC.

**Update City’s website to provide information on current assets.**
The City has an active website. It highlights the celebration of a recent centennial, legal notices, land development regulations, housing notices, and City Department Directory among other things. However, the
website doesn’t tell visitors or users of the website where the City is located. It may be of value to highlight or include more information about the City’s history as a way to help tell Chiefland’s story to potential visitors and engage them in the City’s historical significance. The website currently provides information on recreational and community amenities in the City, but it could be expanded to highlight other attractions in the City or those nearby. For example, the Dakotah Winery, Manatee Springs State Park, and Levy Quilt Museum are attractions in the area that could be featured on the website. While the Chiefland Greater Area Chamber does include a significant amount of this information on its website, the City could do the same, or consider providing a prominent link to the Chamber on the City’s website, directing visitors to seek this information from the Chamber website. It may be helpful to include maps on the website for the City’s amenities, including recreational opportunities, and administrative and civic resources. It may also be helpful to include a link to the official tourism site for Dixie, Gilchrist, and Levy counties, http://visitnaturecoast.com/. This will help eliminate the need for updates.

**Improve wayfinding and “gateway” signage.**

At the primary northern, southern, eastern, and western boundaries, there are signs that make visitors aware that they have entered the City of Chiefland. However, signage for locations such as the City’s Industrial Park, Stickland Park, and other prominent features could be increased. During the asset mapping exercise, the question was raised about how people find their way once they get into the city. The response was that “… if you’re from Chiefland, you just know.” Other than the navigational signs at local highway junctions, there is very little signage to make travelers and visitors aware of what Chiefland has to offer. Upon entering the City boundaries, the City may want to consider adding streetscaping improvements to create gateways into the City. Every point of entry into the City may not need a gateway, but having them at the entrances for major thoroughfares could be a starting point. Improving wayfinding by providing adequate signage to direct travelers and residents alike to the attractions and destinations the City has to offer would help streamline the navigation process within the City, as well as providing a sense of place.

Another valuable partner that can further strengthen the local education resources is CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion. As the educational assets in Chiefland continue to develop a skilled workforce, CareerSource can be a link that works to connect employers to talented job candidates.

**Pursue pedestrian-friendly crossing for Nature Coast State Trail.**

The Florida Nature Coast Trail is an asset that already has a positive reputation in the City. The trail is utilized by local residents as casual users, as well as outdoor and bike enthusiasts. However, one area of concern from the standpoint of the trail users is that the crossing at U.S. Highway 19/98 is not safe for pedestrians. U.S. Highway 19/98 is the main thoroughfare for the City. At that portion of the road, the speed limit is 35 miles per hour, but
the nearest traffic light in either the northern or southern direction is just over one-tenth of a mile. The trail path does not intersect the road at any other point. Trail users have often expressed concerns that the speed limit is not properly obeyed, and motorists are not safely accommodating. Chiefland might consider a flashing trail crossing, other traffic signal, or other crossing assistance that would alert motorists and require them to stop to allow users of the trail to cross U.S. Highway 19 safely without having to incorporate the timing and programming of an additional traffic light.

**Develop a plan to accommodate and direct growth.**

There are two major growth centers in the City of Chiefland, North Chiefland and South Chiefland. South Chiefland is an unofficially designated part of the City that includes a number of vacant buildings. This area has not experienced the same rate of growth as the the northern part of the city. The area referred to as North Chiefland is where the College of Central Florida Jack Wilkinsin campus and the proposed Suwanee River Community Hospital will be located. As the hospital and college near completion, the potential for auxiliary development greatly increases. In coordination with planned development, there should be sufficient infrastructure (road capacity, water, sewer, proper land uses) to support any increases in development. This may include expanding these services to existing sites and developments within the utility service are that are not currently connected.

Concerns were expressed that South Chiefland could continue to experience challenges as growth continues north, with additional concerns that it will continue linearly along U.S. Highway 19/98. A few ways the City could help to redirect growth may include working with owners of vacant buildings to make façade improvements, and make sure the intention is well known for those buildings that are for sale or lease. The City could also provide local incentives in the form of expedited permitting, or a reduction in utility connection fees or consumption rates. The City has been highly successful at securing Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding through DEO’s Bureau of Community Revitalization. This funding could be acquired and targeted for South Chiefland and coupled with a growth plan specifically for this area of the city.

**Develop a brand for the City.**

There are several characteristics that make the City of Chiefland unique, from its natural resources to its agrarian heritage. The City may capture this character into a branding strategy that would help to make the City’s unique story more visible to community members and visitors alike. It is important to recognize that the idea of “branding” can go far beyond a logo. It can be incorporated into local business products and advertising, events, and even building design as ways to increase the visibility of the City of Chiefland and perhaps make it more recognizable or differentiate its identity from other communities in the area and state as a whole. This may be
especially effective in a community that has a major transportation corridor moving through it, providing the opportunity to catch the eye of a high volume of people moving through the City on a daily basis.

An early step for branding is to involve the community in the efforts through exercises or contests that would allow for the efforts to ultimately be community driven. This brand could then be incorporated into numerous aspects of the City, such as signage and marketing. The City currently has a resident muralist who is very interested in providing the City with public art. Partnerships such as this could be utilized to bring the brand to fruition. The City has several features to highlight, from its Native American roots to the historic railroad, agriculture, and the natural surroundings.

Consider more historic preservation efforts.
Historic Chiefland has roots that date back to the early days of the Florida railroad in the 1920s. The City had a train depot on the now-defunct Atlantic Coast Line Railroad that now serves as a museum and office of the Chiefland Greater Area Chamber of Commerce. However, there could be more of a concentrated and unified effort to preserve the historic character of the City. The State of Florida, specifically, the Department of State, Division of Historical Resources has resources and staff capacity to first help identify the major historical assets in the community, while also offering grant opportunities that can apply to a diverse number of projects. Their Special Category Grants serve to assist major site-specific archaeological excavations, the major restoration or rehabilitation of historic buildings or structures, and major museum exhibits involving the development and presentation of information on the history of Florida. Their small matching grants serve to assist in the identification, excavation, protection, and rehabilitation of historic and archaeological sites in Florida and to provide public information about these important resources. There is also a designation of Certified Local Government (CLG) with the National Park Service, which comes at no cost and no recurring fees. This designation is a significant stepping stone to acquiring historic preservation funding, as the state receives funding from the Federal Historic Preservation Fund and is required to give at least 10 percent to CLGs as sub-grants.

Explore options of creating a Community Redevelopment Area (CRA).
A Community Redevelopment Area (CRA) is a development tool that has had success in other communities around the state. In working with the City, there has been some hesitation to fully commit to a CRA, so an option to consider is to have a CRA feasibility analysis or study performed to determine if a CRA would be a viable option for the City to pursue. An alternative to establishing a CRA according to Chapter 163-356, F.S., would be to use a similar model without the formal designation. Additionally, the proposed CRA could be designated in the area of the City’s choosing. This could be an additional mechanism to direct growth or revitalize South Chiefland. One partner that can assist with the feasibility of and creating a CRA is the Florida Redevelopment Association, which can also provide best practices guides and advice on other grant opportunities.
Conclusion

Working with the leadership, residents, and business owners in the City of Chiefland has truly been a motivating experience for all regional and state partners involved in this effort. The City’s diverse resources and passionate community leaders can be the driving force towards the future, and serve as an example for other communities to follow.

Of note, the City of Chiefland has several key assets that may serve as a growth foundation that attracts supporting businesses. These key assets may be promoted, accelerated, or otherwise enhanced to ensure that the existing strong assets add to their impact. The Nature Coast Trail, Central Florida College Campus, and Suwannee River Community Hospital each would bring strong growth potential to Chiefland.

Fostering partnerships beyond municipal borders with state agencies, organizations, and universities can be a major tool in helping the City of Chiefland implement its vision. However, it is those passionate community leaders who will be the difference between seeing the vision and reaching the vision, and the City of Chiefland has no shortage of those leaders. DEO staff and the Rural Economic Development Initiative partners who worked with the City of Chiefland appreciate the relationships formed and the knowledge gained from working with members of the community and spending time in the City of Chiefland.

Just a friendly reminder:

Thank you for reading! The information in this report, along with the ideas shared during the asset mapping exercise, are intended to be used as a brainstorming tool for the county when creating their economic development action plan. Many of the recommendations contained in this report are the result of a snapshot observation from individuals with limited perspective. The community as a whole will ultimately carry the vision and decide what steps to outline in the Economic Development Strategy to realize this vision.
Appendices

Appendix A: All Assets Visited During Exercise

1. Nature Coast State Trail, Trailhead
2. Manatee Springs State Park
3. Proposed Suwanee River Community Hospital
4. Proposed Jack Wilkinson Central Florida College Campus
5. Historic Train Depot
6. Dakotah Winery
7. Levy County Quilt Museum
8. Strickland Park Sporting Complex
9. Buie Park
10. Delma Locke Park
11. Chiefland Industrial Park
12. Chiefland Golf and Country Club
13. Quality Inn
14. Days Inn
15. U.S. Highway 19/98
16. U.S. Alternate Highway 27
17. State Route 129
18. Chiefland Farmers’ Flea Market
19. White Farms
20. Tillis Farms
21. Chiefland RV Park
22. Chiefland Theater (Suwanee Valley Players Community Theater)
23. Vacant property: 1109 N Young Blvd (Former location of Mangrove Outfitters)
24. Vacant property: 315 N.W. 11th Ave. (Former location of Central Florida Electric Cooperative Warehouse)
25. Vacant property: 500 S. Main St. (Former location of Southend Flea Market)
26. Vacant property: 1604 N. Young Blvd. (Former location of Perkins State Bank)
27. Vacant property: 307 S. Main St. (Former location of Yum Yum Ice Cream Shop)
28. Vacant property: 221 S. Main St. (Former location of Greenway Sub Shop)
29. Vacant property: 1402 N. Young Blvd. (Former location of Huddle House)
30. Vacant property: 2631 N. Young Blvd. (Former location of Fun 4 Kids Day Care)
31. Vacant property: 1571 N.W. 25th St. (Former location of Go Cart Track)
32. Vacant property: 1605 N. Young Blvd. (Former location of Sav-A-Ton Gas Station)
Appendix B: Asset Mapping Participants

Mary Elzey, City of Chiefland
Bryan Hassell, City of Chiefland
Laurie Copeland, City of Chiefland
Laura Cain, City of Chiefland
Julie Dennis, Florida Department of Economic Opportunity
John Reddick, Florida Department of Economic Opportunity
Nia Clark, Florida Department of Economic Opportunity
Chris Wiglesworth, Florida Department of Economic Opportunity
Bruce Day, Withlacoochee Regional Planning Council
Jordan Green, Florida Department of Transportation, District 2
Dave Dickens, Suwannee River Water Management District
Carol Westmoreland, Florida League of Cities
Holly McGlashan, College of Central Florida
Thomas Skinner, CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion
Diane Scholz, North Florida Economic Development Partnership
Dave Pieklik, Nature Coast Business Development Council
Melissa Roberts, Enterprise Florida, Inc.
Rick Pettis, David H. Melvin Engineering
Dana Waters, City of Webster
Appendix 2: Asset Photos

**U.S. 19/98 (Main Street)**

**S.R. 129**

**Chiefland High School**
HISTORIC TRAIN DEPOT

NATURE COAST STATE TRAIL
COMMUNITY ASSET:

Buie Park

Chiefland RV Park
MANATEE SPRINGS STATE PARK

GO-KART TRACK

STRICKLAND PARK SPORTING COMPLEX
CHIEFLAND QUALITY INN

CHIEFLAND GOLF AND COUNTRY CLUB

TILLIS FARMS