CITY OF STARKE

COMPETITIVE FLORIDA ASSET MAPPING REPORT

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
DIVISION OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
Acknowledgements

The Department of Economic Opportunity would like to thank the City of Starke 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, please see Appendix B.
Introduction

The City of Starke is a partner community in the 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 April 14, 2015, a team of experts from state and regional agencies partnered with community leaders to visit the unique assets in Starke. The teams brainstormed potential opportunities to expand upon the assets in ways that may further Starke’s economic and community development. Building on the assets already present within the town is a strategy aimed at minimizing 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 the long-term actions of policymakers and communities to promote a high and rising standard of living and economic health in a specific area. These are the actions that a community can take to incrementally improve itself, leading to the attraction of residents and the increase of 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 that know the City of Starke 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.

**Bradford County Development Authority**

*100 E Call St., Starke, FL*

The Bradford County Development Authority (BCDA) is located within the North Florida Regional Chamber of Commerce. The BCDA promotes economic and community development in Bradford County by providing information about local accommodations, attractions, demographics, climate, infrastructure, expansion and relocation incentives, and other pertinent topics to site selectors, prospective businesses, and businesses seeking to expand in Bradford County. The BCDA’s position within the North Florida Regional Chamber of Commerce facilitates the development of connections between new, expanded, and established businesses within the county. The BCDA does not have its own website but is featured on the North Florida Regional Chamber of Commerce’s website at [http://www.northfloridachamber.com/index.php](http://www.northfloridachamber.com/index.php).

**Starke Farmers’ Market**

*1801 N Temple Ave., Starke, FL*

Starke’s Farmers’ Market is one of twelve State Farmers’ Markets operated by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. State Farmers’ Markets provide the information, leadership, and modern marketing facilities necessary to move quality farm products from farm to consumer at prices that are reasonable, yet provide producers with fair returns. In addition to providing the space for the marketing of farm goods, the Starke Farmers’ Market leases office, warehouse, and truck parking facilities. Additional information about the Starke Farmers’ Market can be found at [http://www.freshfromflorida.com/Divisions-Offices/Marketing-and-Development/Agriculture-Industry/Business-Development-Resources/State-Farmers-Markets/Starke-Farmers-Market](http://www.freshfromflorida.com/Divisions-Offices/Marketing-and-Development/Agriculture-Industry/Business-Development-Resources/State-Farmers-Markets/Starke-Farmers-Market).
Bradford County Fairground
2300 N Temple Ave., Starke, FL
The Farmers’ Market is adjacent to the Bradford County Fairground. It was noted that fairground facilities may benefit from structural improvements, both to the internal building and to the separate restroom facilities. It was also noted that the grassy, porous terrain on which the fairground is located has a tendency to become muddy during large events such as the county fair, which some expressed as a deterrent to potential visitors. More broadly, inadequate drainage in parking areas for the fairground and the farmers’ market appear to reduce pedestrian mobility and degrade the quality of the pavement. More information about fairground facilities can be located at http://www.bradfordcountyfair.net/p/info-and-rentals/209.

Davis Express
US-301, Starke, FL
Founded in 1979, Davis Express is a family-owned and -operated trucking company located on approximately 60 acres of land south of Starke on Highway 301. Davis Express operates as a regional truckload carrier specializing in refrigerated hauling, which sets them apart from trucking companies who haul only “dry” (non-temperature controlled) freight. The company is also notable for its use of some of the most advanced communications and freight tracking technologies available on the market. Davis Express’ owners also own several other facilities in Florida and other states. They manage a fleet of 385 trucks and 600 trailers that are used to transport grocery items and consumer products in the southeastern United States, primarily in Florida and Georgia. Davis Express offers heavy duty towing services to local companies and government agencies. Davis Express’ largest customer is Publix, with customers including Tyson, Purdue, Pilgrim’s Pride, and Walmart.

Davis Express currently has 335 employees, 35 of whom live in Bradford County. The company would like to expand but is limited in its ability to do so by a current shortage of drivers. Davis Express is a member of the Florida Trucking Association and has participated in a successful marketing and branding campaign aimed at improving the image of the trucking industry. The success of this effort could potentially be leveraged into attracting more jobs to the City of Starke. More information about Davis Express is available at http://www.davis-express.com/.
Florida Twin Theatre  
101 W Call St., Starke, FL  
The Florida Twin Theater is located in Starke’s historic downtown and is one of the last remaining operational downtown movie theatres in the State of Florida. It has two digital screens on which it shows the newest movie releases at competitive prices. The theatre has one screen with 220 seats and another screen with 90 seats. Ongoing improvements include the replacement of seating and the addition of extra capacity for patrons. The theatre’s historic character and modern amenities give patrons a unique and memorable movie-going experience. More information may be obtained at http://www.floridatwintheatre.com/.

Hampton Lake Bed & Breakfast/Hampton Lake  
9138 SW 71 St., Hampton, FL  
The Hampton Lake Bed & Breakfast is the only bed and breakfast in the Starke area. It contains seven bedrooms and has capacity for up to 17 patrons at a time. Breakfast is included with the room fee, but packages that include three meals a day are available. The Bed & Breakfast is located next to scenic Hampton Lake, which can be viewed from the facility’s back porch. Guests have access to a dock and canoes. Hampton Lake Bed & Breakfast does most of its advertising online, through which it attracts vacationers on the weekend and business travelers during the week. It typically experiences its highest occupancy rates when major events are being held in the area. More information is available at http://hamptonlakebb.com/.

Keystone Airpark  
7100 Airport Rd., Starke, FL  
The Keystone Airpark is located at the Keystone Heights Airport, approximately eight miles southeast of Downtown Starke on State Road 100. The airpark straddles the border between Bradford and Clay Counties and contains land in both jurisdictions. Major tenants at the airpark include Mercair, Keystone Air, and County Line Aviation. Other tenants include the Keystone Heights Sportsmen’s Club, a skeet range, and Camp Crystal Lake. There are several hundred acres of the airpark available for light industrial and manufacturing use. Keystone also has a conference room available for half- or full-day rentals. The City of Starke might consider coordinating with Keystone as it continues to develop its economic development strategy. More information about Keystone Airpark can be found at http://keystoneairport.com/.
KOA Campground
1475 S. Walnut St., Starke, FL
The KOA Campground caters to both overnight and short-term guests as well as long-term residents. The campground offers over 100 RV sites, all of which have water, sewer, and electric hookups in place. Climate controlled cabins (“Kabins”) are also available. Occupancy rates are typically high, with visitors frequently returning due to satisfaction with the grounds. The Campground offers amenities such as a swimming pool, a dog park, and laundry facilities, as well as activities such as bingo, poker, and crafting. With high quality facilities and services and affordable rates, the KOA Campground draws in a diverse clientele year round. More information can be found at http://www.starkekoa.com/.

Starke Sod Farm
5035 SE 143rd Terrace, Starke, FL
The Starke Sod Farm is a public-private partnership between the City of Starke and Starke Sod, a local sod producer, in which Starke’s 300-acre wastewater spray field is leased for sod farming. Farming operations improve the filtration of the wastewater so that it is fully treated once it enters the aquifer. Properly treating the wastewater was historically a large expense for the City, but this partnership has converted it into a source of revenue. The sod farm is currently in a 30-year contract with the city. Both the city and the sod farm are enthusiastic about the benefits of the partnership. Starke Sod maintains a website at http://starkesod.com/index.php.

Downtown Starke
Starke’s downtown area contains several buildings on the National Register of Historic Places as well as space for retail, dining, offices, and outdoor events. Ample on-street parking and wide sidewalks, with room for seating and vendors, function to create a pedestrian-friendly streetscape. There are currently four restaurants in Downtown Starke, with space for additional restaurants. There is both potential and a growing desire to attract businesses downtown to bring additional amenities and shopping opportunities into the local area. With infrastructure already in place, attracting new businesses downtown may continue to significantly revitalize the area.
Shands Starke Regional Medical Center
922 E. Call St., Starke, FL
The Shands Starke Regional Medical Center has operated in Bradford County since 1956. The hospital serves Bradford, Clay, and Union Counties and is fully accredited by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, the leading standard-setting and accreditation body in health care in the United States. The hospital offers a variety of acute care services and state-of-the-art medical technology but lacks the facilities to provide care for trauma patients or accommodate large-scale medical services such as open heart surgery.

Shands Starke Regional Medical Center currently has 25 beds but has room for 49. The Emergency Room was constructed 10 years ago, contains 10 beds, and takes in approximately 65 patients a day; it has an average wait time of less than 5 minutes. The hospital has 200 full-time employees, including 80 Registered Nurses, and four new physicians, including a podiatrist, two pediatricians, and a cardiologist. There is a surgeon on staff every day. Shands Starke is currently approaching capacity in its surgical wing and it plans to construct a new Post-Anesthesia Care Unit to provide more room for post-surgical patient care. More information about the facility may be found at http://www.shandsstarke.com/.

Santa Fe College Andrews Center
209 W Call St., Starke, FL
Santa Fe College Andrews Center offers a variety of academic programs aimed at different segments of the local community. Programs offered include high school dual enrollment programs, associate degree programs, adult education programs, and lifelong learning programs. Santa Fe College has been a valuable asset to Bradford County through its partnerships with other local educational and training resources, including the Bradford County School System. More information may be found at http://www.sfcollege.edu/locations/andrews-center/index.
**Sante Fe College Bradford County Incubator**

*819 S Walnut St., Starke, FL*

The Sante Fe College Bradford County Incubator is a partnership between the Santa Fe Center for Innovation & Economic Development and CareerSource North Central Florida aimed at promoting entrepreneurship and small business development in the Bradford County region. A 12 week training program is available at no cost to eligible participants, with preference for scholarships given to un- or underemployed applicants. Instruction is provided in areas relating to all aspects of business development, including refining the business plan, management, record keeping, and marketing. Training includes classroom instruction, workshops, and one-on-one coaching. More information about the Incubator is available at [http://www.sfcollege.edu/cied/incubator/index.php?section=bradfordincubator](http://www.sfcollege.edu/cied/incubator/index.php?section=bradfordincubator).

**Bradford-Union Technical Center**

*609 N Orange St., Starke, FL*

Bradford-Union Technical Center offers career programs in a variety of disciplines, including carpentry, automotive service, computer systems technology, information technology, accounting, cosmetology, commercial truck driving, and nursing. Some of these programs are open to students as young as 16 years old. Students in certain programs graduate with industry standard certifications, including the Microsoft Office Specialist Bundle Certification available through the Administrative Office Specialist Program; several American Welding Society certifications available through the Applied Welding Technologies Program; and Commercial Driver’s Licenses available through the Commercial Vehicle Driving Program. In partnership with CareerSource Florida, Bradford Union Technical Center works with local employers to create programs designed around the needs of the employers. Students who complete these programs graduate with the knowledge and skills needed to enter the local workforce. This partnership thus allows students to increase their employability in local markets while simultaneously providing local employers with a larger pool of skilled labor. More information is available at [http://www.butc.edu/page/home](http://www.butc.edu/page/home).
Governor Charley E. Johns Conference Center
1610 N Temple Ave., Starke, FL

The Governor Charley E. Johns Conference Center is owned by Bradford County and operated by the Bradford County Tourist Development Council. It contains three meeting rooms, kitchen facilities, office storage, and restrooms. Facilities may be rented out for private events for groups as large as 800. Additional amenities, such as a dance floor, are available to rent for an extra fee.

Currently, the Suwannee River Water Management District is addressing drainage issues on the conference center site by placing asphalt millings on the grassy parking area located north of the building. The county intends to rehabilitate a concrete out-building located near the center’s southern property line. The facility may also benefit from updates to the camera and public address systems, renovations to the kitchen and the meeting room partition, and the purchase of new tables. More information is available at http://www.northfloridachamber.com/conference-center.php.

Wings of Dreams Aviation Museum
7100 Airport Rd., Starke, FL

The Wings of Dreams Aviation Museum is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization founded in 2005 to preserve the Keystone Heights Airport (formerly the Keystone Army Airfield), which has a rich military history as a World War II Army Air Corps air base. Keystone Heights Airport Wings of Dreams is located within the Clay County portion of Keystone Heights Airpark but is still proximate and an asset to the City of Starke. The Museum leases the ground on which its facilities are located. The facility now consists of a relatively small aviation museum and an airport hangar full of recently collected and inventoried NASA space program artifacts. Wings of Dreams plans on expanding in the future to include additional facilities such as a space museum, an aerospace education annex, an aviation resource library, and a restaurant.

Wings of Dreams is involved in several educational outreach programs. In collaboration with the University of Florida’s Department of Astronomy, Wings of Dreams offers an after-school program for Keystone Heights high school students interested in astronomy. Wings of Dreams also offers Solar System Adventures, an after-school STEM education program funded through a NASA grant. Wings of Dreams’ coordinators intend to make these and other programs available to
students in surrounding rural communities as necessary resources become available. More information about Wings of Dream may be found at http://www.wingsofdreams.org/.

Florida International Rally & Motorsport (FIRM) Park
7266 Airport Rd., Starke, FL
Florida International Rally & Motorsport (FIRM) Park is located within Keystone Airpark and, according to its management, is the most diverse and challenging full-service motorsports facility in the eastern United States. The facility contains over 400 acres of paved, gravel, and dirt tracks; six expert designed European-style rally stages; a 6,000 square-foot race and tuning shop; two student classrooms; private garages; and storage. FIRM operates one of only three schools in the United States to offer true European-style (closed-circuit racing that takes place on multiple surfaces) rally training. It also operates a DriverPro School that offers Sport Utility Vehicle (SUV) driving and All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) riding courses. FIRM also provides event planning services, training, team-building exercises, and exclusive media events to clients representing a variety of industries. Motor vehicle test sessions, track rental, and single- and multi-day training programs are also offered. FIRM staff indicated that its rally course has recently been featured in two movie productions. More information about FIRM may be found at http://www.gorally.com/.

International Security Academy (ISA)
7266 Airport Rd., Starke, FL
The International Security Academy (ISA) is located within the FIRM Park and utilizes several of the same facilities as FIRM. ISA staff include elite Special Operations Forces from private security firms, government agencies, and all branches of military service. ISA staff have extensive experience in advanced tactical firearms, hand-to-hand combat, operational planning, and emergency management. FIRM and ISA operate in partnership and can provide customizable “ultimate adventure experiences,” including driving a Lamborghini, world-class rally driving instruction, sky-diving, and training in tactical driving, firearms, and self-defense. FIRM and ISA indicate that their patrons are often from other states and countries. ISA is also open to becoming more involved in the local community. More information about ISA may be found at http://www.isafla.com/.

Camp Crystal Lake
6724 Camp Crystal Rd., Starke, FL
Camp Crystal Lake occupies 140 acres in Clay County that were once part of the Keystone Army Air Corps Base. Located five miles north of Keystone Heights, the camp is accessed from the Keystone Airpark. The American Camp Association regards Camp Crystal Lake as one of the best residential summer camps for children in the
southeastern United States. While the camp was not listed as an asset to be evaluated during the asset mapping exercise, the facility should be of interest to the city because it provides employment and can provide activities for local youth. More information about Camp Crystal Lake may be found at http://campcrystal.com/.
Recommendations

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

Expand marketing of local assets

The Bradford County Development Authority (BCDA) may consider creating a page on the North Florida Chamber of Commerce’s website or a website of its own listing information about local assets and existing businesses. This could also focus on business expansion and recruitment, help advertise local workforce educational programs and CareerSource North Central Florida to the local business and industrial community, and provide a list of the top reasons why businesses should consider relocating to Starke, including applicable resources and contacts.

Bradford County and the City of Starke along with community partners such as the Chamber of Commerce might work with local businesses to help develop an online presence through such sites as Trip Advisor and Yelp, which are well-established, trusted by the public, and low-cost. An online presence might also be established for Starke’s historic downtown. This website could list Starke’s historic assets and their background, tell the history of the area, and include a calendar of events.

The BCDA could work to identify and develop more industrial sites. It might also purchase land to offer to businesses for development. Additionally, efforts might be made to list available sites on regional and state databases.

Pursue opportunities with the State Farmers’ Market

The Starke Farmers’ Market has been recognized as one of the city’s top assets because of its potential to act as a catalyst for community and economic development. The community might highlight this feature through a regularly-scheduled community farmers’ market with locally-grown produce. Such an event may add diversity to the list of amenities and attractions available in Starke. Moreover, this event could be a partnership with the local health department to provide education about sustainable food systems and the importance of fresh produce to public health. The event could be held in a shaded, open-air facility constructed on the fairgrounds property. Other features, such as a children’s play area with water features, a pavilion, and a picnic area including tables and grills, could enhance the appeal of the facility. This would enable the community farmers’ market to function as a true destination and not just as a place to purchase produce.

Consideration should be given to additional improvements that may be necessary for this community farmers’ market to be feasible. This might include how facilities on these grounds could simultaneously focus on food, physically-active leisure activities, public health, and education about these topics. This may include city- and/or county-led improvements to the Starke Farmers’ Market location, which is owned by the Bradford County Fair Association. Support for these improvements may be available from the Bradford County Cooperative Extension Service. The County Extension Service is a partnership between the United States Department of Agriculture
and the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) intended to provide scientific, research-based educational programming and information to Bradford County residents in the areas of agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer sciences, and 4-H youth development. Other improvements might focus on addressing drainage issues on the Fairgrounds property, particularly in the northern parking area and near the stage. Potential funding to address drainage issues and improvements may be available from the Suwannee River Water Management District. Grant funding for all of these site improvements may also be available through the Florida Department of Agriculture’s Rural Development Office and the Department of Environmental Protection’s Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program (FRDAP), as well as through the United States Department of Agriculture’s Rural Development office.

The city might consider marketing the community farmers’ market alongside the proximate State Farmers’ Market, local IFAS extension, and Bradford County Fairgrounds as a regional destination for food, health, and entertainment. After-school and summer activities for young people could be included. As part of this initiative, the city could engage with local youth to determine both what facilities they would like to see constructed as well as to determine how best to encourage them to participate in the community farmers’ market once it is established. Moreover, the city might consider an online marketing campaign to advertise the community farmers’ market, including the establishment of accounts on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. The city could also consider correcting the Starke Farmers’ Market listing on Care2, an organization that allows users to locate farmers’ markets. Care2 lists the Bradford County Farmers’ Market as “closed,” which may deter potential patrons from attending if they are unaware of the truth.

Increase awareness of the facilities located at Keystone Airpark
The city might consider increasing public awareness and support of, as well as local involvement with, the Wings of Dreams, FIRM, and ISA facilities. These assets provide Starke with unique and marketable cultural, educational, recreational, and training opportunities. The opportunities to create greater community awareness of, support for, and involvement with these facilities are many and varied. Increasing involvement with these businesses may be desirable because it could help boost tourism and tourism-related activities in the area. For example, Bradford County Schools could provide all of its middle school students with the opportunity to attend a field trip to Wings of Dreams. Starke’s restaurants and lodging establishments might consider offering packages for food and shelter to patrons attending corporate functions and team building events at FIRM and ISA.

Starke might consider taking advantage of Wings of Dreams’ mission to preserve and showcase Florida’s military, aviation, and space history by coordinating with the Bradford County School District’s Education Foundation in order to encourage student participation in Wings of Dreams’ youth programs. The city may consider coordinating with the Bradford and Clay County Tourist Development Councils and the North Florida Regional Chamber of Commerce to help promote the museum locally, regionally, and statewide as a unique
learning and cultural experience. For example, Wings of Dreams could eventually be integrated into an all-encompassing tour of the Camp Blanding Museum and Memorial Park, which is currently highlighted on the Clay County Tourist Development Council’s webpage.

Wings of Dreams’ Aviation Museum is currently seeking additional building floor space to display NASA artifacts; provide office and meeting space for educational programs, workshops, a gift shop, and café. Funding for these expansions may be available through the Florida Department of State Division of Historical Resources’ Special Category Grants program. These funds can be used to assist in the establishment of museum exhibits involving the development and presentation of information on the history of Florida. Types of projects eligible for Division of Historical Resources Special Category Grant funding include the acquisition of historic property; projects that highlight the design, fabrication, and installation of museum furniture and equipment; and the production of related media. Eligible applicants include non-profit organizations and local governments (and units of local governments, state agencies, and universities). Engineering works, artifacts, or other objects with intrinsic historical value or any part thereof relating to the history, government, and culture of Florida are included in the division’s definition of “historic property.”

Continue to expand visibility and availability of educational resources
One of the strengths of Bradford County’s educational system is the way that it enables students to customize their education based on their unique interests and abilities while simultaneously increasing the community’s pool of skilled labor. This process begins at the middle school level, where qualified and interested students are able to take courses for high school credit, thus earning more flexibility in choosing their classes when they reach high school. Once in high school, qualified and interested students are eligible to enroll in the Santa Fe College or Bradford Union Technical Center dual enrollment programs. Many of the programs have been designed with the labor needs of local employers in mind. Students graduate high school with college credit and/or marketable skills, which can be applied to their education, increase their technical skills, or assist with entering the workplace. Students benefit from being able to tailor their education to their personal goals, while the community benefits from a highly educated and skilled workforce that is adapted to local labor market needs.

These exceptional educational resources should be more widely marketed, both locally and in the larger region. Efforts should also be made to expand both the number and capacity of programs offered. This will facilitate the identification of new institutional partners as well as increase the training, workforce development, and educational offerings to the region and to members of the local community.
These educational and workforce training programs might be integrated into efforts to recruit businesses to the local community. This could be facilitated through partnership with the North Florida Chamber of Commerce, the North Florida Economic Development Partnership, and/or CareerSource North Central Florida. A skilled workforce is a key factor in business siting; therefore, highlighting these programs and how they function to strengthen and diversify the local labor market may make the area more attractive to businesses looking to locate in Starke and Bradford County. Moreover, a strong local educational system will appeal to business owners with children, who will likely desire to site their business in an area wherein their children can be assured of a quality education.

**Expand facilities available at and usage of the Governor Charlie E. Johns Conference Center**

With its proximity to the downtown district and to lodging as well as to the Bradford County Fairgrounds, the Governor Charley E. Johns Conference Center is a major asset for Starke. The city may consider coordinating with the Suwannee River Water Management District to expand the scope of the parking lot improvements now being planned to include a stabilized concrete surface for deliveries along the rear and south side of the building. Though the conference center is already highlighted on the North Florida Regional Chamber of Commerce website, the city might coordinate with the chamber and the Tourist Development Council to pursue additional opportunities for leasing the facility. This may complement already established outdoor events, such as the annual Strawberry Festival and County Fair as well as craft, car, and motorcycle shows. For example, the conference center might be rented out to provide indoor space for patrons of these events to cool off or take a break. The center’s concrete out-building might also be used to provide storage for the furniture, equipment, and supplies necessary to hold outdoor functions.

**Continue to pursue expansion of broadband availability**

The need for improved high-speed internet services was consistently expressed as a priority by respondents of the expansive survey of community members undertaken by the City of Starke. The city has engaged in conversations with community internet providers about increasing broadband capacity, but no further steps toward implementation have been taken as of yet.

It should be noted that a significant demand for expanded broadband exists among Starke’s businesses and employers as well its residents. For example, Shands Starke Regional Medical Center related that its current broadband capacity only meet approximately 10 percent of its demand. Expanding broadband access in the community may allow for the improvement or expansion of local businesses or serve as an additional incentive for new and outside businesses to relocate to Starke. Improved broadband may also foster the growth of small businesses in Starke, particularly those that are primarily internet-based. Ready access to high-speed internet can help lower the barriers for small businesses to enter the growing e-commerce market. This will likely benefit local assets such as the Bradford County Business Incubator, Bradford-Union Technical Institute, and Santa Fe College, all of which serve local businesses.
Install directional signage for the downtown area
As the U.S. Highway 301 bypass around Downtown Starke is developed, it will be important to install signage highlighting those assets that are present in the downtown area. The bypass will direct freight and other traffic around the city, so informing travelers of the amenities, activities, and facilities available in Downtown Starke before they reach the bypass can help retain the traffic that those downtown businesses want and need in order to prosper and grow.

Expand the city’s social media presence
The City of Starke does not currently have a strong social media presence. Social media is a low-cost way to increase the visibility of the city’s assets to potential visitors and current residents. While not everyone is active on social media, it can serve as a medium for sharing news and information within the community and build connections between community members. One of the unique advantages offered by social media is that it is interactive; that is, whereas traditional advertisements provide information to the public, social media allows the public the engage in conversation with advertisers. Feedback can be immediate, and the public is able to easily find additional information about any events, programs, or products. Social media can also be effective in engaging community youth.

Potential social media sites may include Facebook and Twitter. Additionally, geocaching, while requiring slightly more familiarity with technology, may offer a uniquely interactive opportunity to tell Starke’s story to potential visitors and current residents.

Explore the feasibility of reintroducing the Main Street Program
Starke’s downtown area is a tremendous asset. With quality anchor businesses such as the Twin Theater and the Downtown Grill along with its designation as a historic district, Starke’s downtown has the potential to serve as a catalyst and appropriate site for increased commercial activities. This could be facilitated by reintroduction of the Main Street Program to Starke. The revamping of this program may improve coordination of new and existing events, help with the pursuit and acquisition of grants such as the Florida Department of State’s Small Matching and Special Category grants, and help guide the implementation of the City of Starke’s vision for its downtown.

Additionally, Starke is not currently a Certified Local Government, a designation which can improve a community’s ability to qualify for historic preservation grants. The reactivation of the Main Street Program may help facilitate Starke obtaining this designation in the future.
Explore expansion of recreational opportunities
Starke has several outdoor recreational assets that are underutilized. Increased access to and awareness of these recreational opportunities may help attract visitors that will support local businesses and can provide additional benefits to the community. It was consistently noted that there is a lack of activities for youth in Starke. Increased recreational amenities may provide more options for youth and families alike and further strengthen Starke’s marketability as a place to live, work, and play.

These underutilized natural resource assets include several nearby lakes. The closest of these include Hampton Lake, Lake Sampson, Crosby Lake, and Lake Rowell. Businesses such as the Hampton Lake Bed & Breakfast emphasized that the lakes are not used to their full capacity. Other businesses such as the KOA Campground related that many visitors were unaware of recreational amenities in the area. The city might consider partnering with the county to increase community awareness of, and access to, these assets. Options include installing directional signage, marketing Starke’s proximity to pristine natural assets, and improving public access to these bodies of water with grant funding such as that available through Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission’s Florida Boating Improvement Program.

Coordinate with city leaders to tour similar communities
A major step to realizing a vision can be experiencing the accomplishments of similar communities. Visiting with other communities can help Starke officials generate goals and potential implementation strategies as well as develop ideas about how ideas from the other community may be adapted to Starke’s unique needs, interests, and challenges. One potential starting point may be to partner with other Competitive Florida communities, whose economic and community development strategies are also asset-based. Another strategy for engaging with other communities may include hosting representatives from other communities to exchange ideas, lessons, and perspectives. These connections can be made with other Competitive Florida communities as well as with other networking entities, such as the Florida League of Cities.
Conclusion

Working with the leadership, residents, and business owners in the City of Starke 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.

The City of Starke 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.

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

Just a friendly reminder:

Thank you for reading! The information in this report is, along with the ideas shared during the asset mapping exercise, 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 city and 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. Bradford County Development Authority Industrial Park
2. Bradford County Fairgrounds
3. Bradford Farmers’ Market
4. Bradford High School
5. Bradford Sportsmen’s Farm
6. Bradford-Union Technical Center
7. Bradford-Union Technical Center Truck Driving School
8. Davis Express
9. Edwards Road Recreation Complex
10. Florida International Rally & Motorsport Park
11. Florida Twin Theatre
12. Governor Charley E. Johns Conference Center
13. Hampton Lake Bed & Breakfast
14. Hope Christian Academy
15. Keystone Airport
16. Lawtey Correctional Institution
17. Northside Christian Academy
18. R. J. Corman Derailment Services
19. Shands Starke Regional Medical Center
20. Southside Elementary
21. Starke KOA Campground
22. Starke Sod Farm
23. Super Walmart
25. Thunder Music Park
Appendix B: Asset Mapping Participant List

1. Alicia McMillan, City of Starke
2. Allara Mills Gutcher, Gadsden County
3. Brenda Wiggins, City of Starke
4. Carol Westmoreland, Florida League of Cities
5. Cheryl Canova, Santa Fe State College
7. John Reddick, Florida Department of Economic Opportunity
8. Jordan Green, Florida Department of Transportation
9. Laurence Andrews, Bradford County Incubator
10. Lila Sellers, Bradford County Schools
11. Mark Yelland, Florida Department of Economic Opportunity
12. Pam Whittle, North Florida Chamber of Commerce
13. Patrick Webster, Suwannee River Water Management District
14. Ricky Thompson, City of Starke
15. Roger Wilburn, Florida Department of Economic Opportunity
16. Ronni Wood, Florida Department of State
17. U.S. Department of Agriculture Representative
18. Valerie Jenkins, Florida Department of Economic Opportunity
Appendix C: Asset Photos

Bradford County Development Authority
Industrial Park

Bradford County Development Authority
Industrial Park

Bradford County Development Authority
Industrial Park

Bradford High School

Bradford High School