

## **GOAL 1: RESTORATION OF PUBLIC TRUST**

**(new goal)**

### **BACKGROUND, DATA AND ANALYSIS**

Article II - Section 8 of the Florida Constitution states that a public office is a public trust. It adds that "the people shall have the right to secure and sustain that trust against abuse." To honor that right, the City must maintain high standards for government accountability, integrity, performance, transparency and communication, while strengthening participation and representation by citizens and by basing City decisions in their interests.

At no other time in history has the importance of citizen trust been higher. National surveys conducted in 2020 captured a growing mood of mistrust in America, even in relation to local government, which historically ranks highly in public confidence. In May 2020, the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research wrote about a growing "trust deficit" between governments and citizens. A July 2020 survey by ICF International tracked declining confidence in local response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In September 2020 Gallup reported a trust level of 71 percent for local governments, down from a previous high of 77 percent. In October 2020, writing for *The Atlantic*, historian David Brooks reported that levels of trust in America were in "historic decline."

Similarly, studies conducted in Fernandina Beach by the National Research Center, Inc. in 2017 and 2019 indicated a significant decline in ratings of City government related to effectiveness, direction, acting in the best interest of the City, integrity, equitable treatment of citizens, and so forth. This growing loss of public trust has had a significant impact on dynamics within our community. However, it is the position of the Comprehensive Plan/LDC Working Group that this trend can be reversed. Core strategies are presented in this goal, and additional relevant strategies are incorporated into each element of the Plan.

As noted in the Introduction to this Plan, there are significant sectors of our local population that are no longer sufficiently involved in most aspects of city governance. It has been more than 20 years since we had an African American mayor, although many of the oldest families in the City have this heritage. Many of the people working in our City grew up here but cannot afford to live here, so they have no vote, although they contribute to our economy. They too are stakeholders whose interests should be considered.

**City of Fernandina Beach 2045 Comprehensive Plan Draft  
Goal 1 (new goal)**

In order to solve difficult problems, the City must understand what residents need and want. To do this, the City must have reliable and current data—and they must be proactive in obtaining it beyond the occasional standard survey. Data analysis entails city leaders and staff listening to stories and reaching out to residents and finding new tools to engage residents who do not typically turn out in large numbers at meetings. Such strategies include staff and leaders attending neighborhood meetings and community gatherings and disaggregating data based on race, gender, ethnicity and neighborhoods. While the City has a strong record of valuing all its communities, it can do more.

The City must also recognize that it plays a critical role in building the collective character of the city that builds the resiliency to solve problems and plans for a sustainable future. Staff should be recognized for their dedication to keeping the city’s economy open during the pandemic. While the city was in quarantine, staff worked to open meetings via zoom and working within CDC guidelines to obtain public feedback. The next step will be to review who attended these meetings and what residents were missing, and to ask what steps can be put in place to close the digital divide and ensure that all voices are heard.

As an incorporated city, Fernandina Beach has grown dramatically in population, complexity and scope of operations since the current Comprehensive Plan was drafted and adopted in 2011. This growth has increased the need for all manner of fiscal oversight and responsibilities, including but not limited to short, medium- and long- term budget planning and monitoring, departmental fiscal accounting, grant writing, and so forth. These tasks have increased in number over time and fallen to those in our city government who already have very full plates. This situation now requires a dedicated officer responsible for the financial health, security and well-being of the City. Our state constitution provides useful guidance. To secure the public trust, our state constitution provides for a Chief Financial Officer (article IV, Section 4) who serves as the chief fiscal officer of the state who "shall settle and approve accounts against the state, and shall keep all state funds and securities." We recommend creation of a CFO position for Fernandina Beach.

Ideally, a CFO position would be best situated as a Charter position in order to ensure robust discussion and negotiation among Charter officers, which would most benefit the City. However, it could also be an Assistant City Manager position. (Refer to Goal 9. Economic Development and Goal 11. Capital Improvements for further details.)

The creation of a CFO position is one example among many measures that the City must consider as it works to strengthen public trust. The Goal further builds on the tools currently being used to measure trust and sets expectations of doing more. To strengthen public trust, this Goal offers six main objectives and supportive policies.

**City of Fernandina Beach 2045 Comprehensive Plan Draft  
Goal 1 (new goal)**

**SELECTED REFERENCES**

<https://www.city-journal.org/disasters-authorities-trust-deficit>

[Trust in Federal Government's Competence Remains Low \(gallup.com\)](#)

[Survey: American Trust in Government During COVID-19 | ICF -  
https://www.icf.com/insights/health/covid-19-survey-trust-government-response-erodes](#)

[Collapsing Levels of Trust Are Devastating America - The Atlantic](#)

<https://www.fbfl.us/DocumentCenter/View/17244/The-NCS-Community-Livability-Report-Fernandina-Beach-2017>

<https://www.fbfl.us/DocumentCenter/View/20802/The-NCS-Community-Livability-Report-Fernandina-Beach-DRAFT-2019>

<https://www.fbfl.us/DocumentCenter/View/20805/The-NCS-Trends-over-Time-Fernandina-Beach-DRAFT-2019>

**OBJECTIVES**

1. Public trust and citizen participation
2. Integrity and performance
3. Transparency and communication
4. Standards for citizen participation and representation
5. Citizen interests
6. Chief Financial Officer

**GOAL 1. PUBLIC TRUST AND CITIZEN PARTICIPATION**

**The City must reestablish and improve public trust in city government by maintaining high standards for government accountability, performance, transparency and communication, while strengthening participation and representation of citizens, and basing decisions on their interests.**

## **OBJECTIVE 1.01. ESTABLISHING MEASURES FOR PUBLIC TRUST AND CITIZEN PARTICIPATION**

**The City must adopt specific criteria, procedures and accountability measures for developing public trust and citizen participation.**

### **POLICY 1.01.01.**

By **June 2021**, each City department must develop a plan that specifies how each of these concepts can be implemented and demonstrated in that particular department based on research of other jurisdictions, departmental discussion, training and community discussions. Community discussions are a critically important element.

### **POLICY 1.01.02.**

By **June 2021**, each City department must review processes and strategies that are currently in place that are effective in working with the public.

### **POLICY 1.01.03.**

By **September 2021**, the City must develop a coordinated plan for addressing the goal of Public Trust based on research of other jurisdictions, departmental, staff and commission discussion, training and community discussions. One element of the plan should be maintaining a log of public communication and subsequent actions taken. Each Dept must submit details on their plans prior to **June 30, 2021**. The outcomes will be articulated and published as City policy.

### **POLICY 1.01.04.**

The procedures above must be followed every year for five years. Following the fifth year, this procedure could be reduced to every other year.

## **OBJECTIVE 1.02. INTEGRITY AND PERFORMANCE**

**The City must identify, adopt and follow policies and procedures for maintaining high standards of integrity and performance.**

### **POLICY 1.02.01.**

All professional decisions must be based on the City Charter, Comprehensive Plan, the Land Development Code and other City ordinances and policies.

### **POLICY 1.02.02.**

All professional decisions must be based on thorough current research and current best practices in the field.

**City of Fernandina Beach 2045 Comprehensive Plan Draft  
Goal 1 (new goal)**

**POLICY 1.02.03.**

Any City employee, commissioner or board/committee member must recuse himself/herself from participating in decision making where he/she has a vested interest or relationship that could influence the decision. Anyone violating this policy must be terminated immediately.

**POLICY 1.02.04.**

Every new employee must receive a clear description of his/her responsibilities that will be used as a basis for performance evaluations and promotions. This description must include demonstration of high standards of integrity and performance and clarification of how these responsibilities relate to Comprehensive Plan goals and policies as well as the Land Development Code and other City policies.

**POLICY 1.02.05.**

Every new employee hired must sign an agreement that they will consistently demonstrate personal and professional integrity in performance of their responsibilities.

**POLICY 1.02.06.**

Standards of integrity and performance must be an integral part of annual performance evaluations and consideration for promotions.

**OBJECTIVE 1.03. TRANSPARENCY AND COMMUNICATION**

**The City must set and follow policies and procedures for enhancing transparency and communication.**

**POLICY 1.03.01.**

Any issue that impacts the public (both city and county residents) must be discussed in multiple public meetings. These meetings must be advertised on social media, in the newspapers and by mail. If an issue affects a particular building or parcel, physical on-site postings must be made with contact information for expressing concern.

**POLICY 1.03.02.**

Any issue that has the potential to impact a neighborhood or community within or adjacent to the City must be discussed with that community. Community individuals and HOAs must be informed by mail, social media, and newspaper listings. At least two meetings must be held to gather community input.

**POLICY 1.03.03.**

The City should review geographical range for notification in the two policies above to expand required notification and include all affected areas, including County sites.

## City of Fernandina Beach 2045 Comprehensive Plan Draft

### Goal 1 (new goal)

#### **POLICY 1.03.04.**

Segments of the population that have disproportionately little input in decision making must be identified and encouraged to participate through elected office, positions in City offices, participation in local organizations and participation in City and committee meetings.

#### **POLICY 1.03.05.**

All City departments must identify ways to optimize their efforts to inform and educate the public in relation to their specializations, changes and new knowledge and document their efforts via annual summary.

### **OBJECTIVE 1.04. CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION**

**The City must maintain high standards of citizen participation and representation.**

#### **POLICY 1.04.01.**

All City residents and guests must be treated equitably.

#### **POLICY 1.04.02.**

Community input must be sought in relation to any proposed change, policy or development that impacts any community, with especially proactive efforts to hear from underrepresented communities, both for the sake of social justice and to ensure the preservation and transfer of valuable local culture.

#### **POLICY 1.04.03.**

The City must develop a plan to actively recruit representatives of underrepresented communities must be actively encouraged to serve on boards, commissions, advisory groups and run for elected office.

#### **POLICY 1.04.04.**

City hiring must reflect the diverse population of the City.

#### **POLICY 1.04.05.**

The City planners and the City attorney must avoid policies and decisions that lead to so-called “gentrification” or removal of so-called “blight,” terms, which can in fact enable the erasure of historic landmarks and even whole communities. Community input must be sought on any potential new policies. Policies that have demonstrated promise, particularly in Florida, must be proposed to the Planning Advisory Board and Commission for consideration. As new policies are adopted, they must be incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan and/or LDC and they must be fully implemented in practice. Such policies might relate to establishment of special zones or areas, provision of resources to maintain ownership of properties, special tax rates within historic

**City of Fernandina Beach 2045 Comprehensive Plan Draft  
Goal 1 (new goal)**

communities and areas, and so forth. This effort must continue until the City has an effective set of strategies for preventing developer-driven gentrification.

**OBJECTIVE 1.05. CITIZEN INTERESTS**

**In making decisions, the City Commission and City Staff may consider a variety of stakeholder views, but it is the ethical responsibility of all who hold either elected or staff positions in the City to base their decisions on the interests of citizens above all.**

**POLICY 1.05.01.**

All professional decisions must be based on the City Charter, Comprehensive Plan, the Land Development Code and other City ordinances and policies.

**POLICY 1.05.02.**

All professional decisions must be based on thorough current research and current best practices in the field.

**POLICY 1.05.03.**

Any City employee, commissioner or board/committee member must recuse himself/herself from participating in decision making where he/she has a vested interest or relationship that could influence the decision. Anyone violating this policy must be terminated immediately.

**OBJECTIVE 1.06. CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER (CFO)**

**The City of Fernandina Beach Commissioners must establish by ordinance the position of Chief Financial Officer by April 1, 2021.**

**POLICY 1.06.01. PURPOSE**

The purpose of the CFO position is to restore public trust in the quality of City financial information and in the performance of all financial and budgetary activities ensuring the following:

1. Expert leadership and fiduciary oversight of all City accounting, financial, budgeting activities.
2. Transparency and accessibility to all department source data, processes and procedures, reporting, and budgeting.
3. Accurate, reliable, compliant, and understandable financial and accounting, budgetary reporting.
4. Analysis, recommendations, and proposals in alignment with the best interest of the majority of residential taxpayers, the comprehensive plan, the City and community vision.
5. A return on tax dollars invested, either financially or commensurate benefits,

## City of Fernandina Beach 2045 Comprehensive Plan Draft

### Goal 1 (new goal)

equitably and with the best value, in all City financial investments, incentives, concessions, tax revenue, negotiated terms, development projects, etc.

6. Analysis of financial outcomes of City financial decisions and investments and consulting contracts to evaluate and improve financial outcomes for the City.

#### **POLICY 1.06.02. DUTIES AND GOALS**

The CFO is primarily responsible for ensuring a return on taxpayer dollars by analyzing and interpreting financial data, conducting future planning, forecasting, and cost/benefit studies of projects and proposals, and in implementing the Economic Development plan. The CFO will offer incisive insight and recommendations in the best interests of the majority of City citizens. The CFO must offer oversight of accounting, finance, and budgeting processes and will direct the department to optimize operational and compliance standards by reviewing and implementing best practice department processes, in coordination with all City departments. As part of Public Trust, the CFO will create easy to understand, forward-looking financial analysis, forecasting, and reporting for aiding in the planning, policy, and strategy decisions and for tax payer and citizen understanding and participation.

The CFO must maximize taxpayer dollars through improved analysis of investments/financing, forecast comprehensive financial benefits of projects, ensure costs/expenses are fair and competitive and not a conflict of financial interest to the City and its taxpayers.

In collaboration with the City Attorney and City Manager, the CFO must engage in City financial risk mitigation in financial consequences of contracts, using forecasting, planning, and modeling tools to ensure that money is spent wisely and equitably with an eye for the greatest return for citizens.

#### **POLICY 1.06.03. BUDGET AND FINANCIAL ACCESSIBILITY AND TRANSPARENCY**

The CFO must work with all departments, the City Manager, and other reporting/taxing authorities and regulatory bodies to create a highly accessible, transparent, and easy-to-understand budgetary process and report for the taxpayer to fully participate. The CFO:

1. Explains in detail to resident taxpayers the process of how the budget gets created, step by step, and how and when citizens can participate.
2. Explains how the budget works and all the different funds and revenue sources for each fund.
3. Decodes jargon, City acronyms and clearly defines the meaning of all budget terms for increasing all taxpayer's understanding of the budget.

## City of Fernandina Beach 2045 Comprehensive Plan Draft

### Goal 1 (new goal)

4. Visualizes spending by departments and services proportional to the overall budget
5. Creates meaningful reporting and analysis commentary for explaining recommendations for City long-range planning and for mitigating financial risks early.
6. Explains in easy-to-understand layman's language, the rationale for why budgetary and financial recommendations are made and why they are predicted to benefit the interests of City taxpayers. Also explains unforeseen financial risks and how they can best be planned for.

#### **POLICY 1.06.04. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

The City's Chief Financial Officer must be the single point of contact to implement the Economic Development element. (If the position is vacant, it will be incumbent upon the City Manager to perform the requirements of the Economic Development Element.) The position must be accountable for creating strategy and planning procedures using the City's vision, the Comprehensive Plan and ample citizen input, to build a robust, resilient, and equitable local economy benefiting all residents. The role must devise best-practice methods for identifying critical and informative local economic data to create highly effective economic development programs and policies. Further, this role must set realistic metrics and evaluation standards for each program objective with an annual evaluation cycle for assessing objective progress. (Further detail in Goal 9. Economic Development)

#### **POLICY 1.06.05 CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS**

The City's Chief Financial Officer (CFO) must be responsible for developing annual, 5-year and 20-year capital improvement plans in collaboration with the Fiscal Advisory Board, further public input, the Floodplain Manager and Chief Resiliency Officer, department directors and the City Commission. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Establishing a consistent process for the development, implementation and review of annual, 5-year and 20-year capital improvement plans;
- Ensuring that criteria for capital improvements and prioritization are appropriate for the physical context and the resources of the City and reflect current knowledge in the field and the values and priorities of the community;
- Coordinating with County fiscal and economic leadership to ensure effective coordination of efforts;
- Ensuring that staff software is compatible with an effective and efficient process.

**City of Fernandina Beach 2045 Comprehensive Plan Draft  
Goal 1 (new goal)**

**POLICY 1.06.06. FISCAL AND ECONOMIC ADVISORY BOARD**

To increase public trust and citizen input, the CFO must create a fiscal and economic advisory board to assist in accomplishing the goals of the Economic Development and Capital Improvements Goals.

**POLICY 1.06.07 SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCE**

The CFO must collaborate with the Floodplain Manager and Chief Resilience Officer and Planning and Conservation Director to ensure the City continues to move in a direction appropriate for our barrier island's physical and environmental sustainability and resilience.